

EVERY MONTH: K9 Queries – 16 pages of reader questions answered by our experts

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Dogs

MONTHLY

JUNE 2015



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Homoeopathy-phobic?
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We put both sides of the argument

Help with the whelp!
Being a breeder gets labour intensive

Better together
Keeping older people
with their pets

Ouch!
Prevent
play-biting

All aboard
for the London
Pet Show

Mystery muse
Honey the Great Dane led
his mistress to become
a big-selling author

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Open Paw is here at last!

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'go to university', too!





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Hello!

If you love animals, and share your home and life with a companion animal or three, then you'll know full well that having a furry friend around makes you happy and keeps you laughing – well, most of the time, that is, so long as they're not doing something they shouldn't! And you won't need convincing that they're a source of enormous comfort in times of stress. We talk to them (and they listen...), cuddle them, simply be with them – and they uncannily seem to know when we're unwell or upset.

This month we're championing dogs that help humans in many different ways. Meet the amazing Marmee – recently crowned Pets As Therapy Dog of the Year – and learn more about the incredible work of the volunteers and their dogs across the country (p32). Our latest HiLife Trophy nominee (p50) explains how her pet Sprocker instinctively helps when she experiences black-outs, while the utterly adorable Jasper, nearing the end of his year as a trainee Hearing Dog (p22), celebrates his first birthday with a slice of cake.

On p14, Laura Tucker from the University of Warwick describes her research into how animals help people at times of severe emotional trauma, giving their carers not only companionship, but also a sense of purpose and, quite literally, something to live for. Her next project will look into the healing bond between injured military service personnel and their animals (both pets and 'professionals'), so if you know anyone who might be interested in taking part, please contact Laura at the address given.

If you know a dog who's helped someone, or just want to share your thoughts on the incredible emotional bond we build with our pets, we'd love to hear from you and will print as many letters as we can. Email gill.s@dogsmonthly.co.uk or write to us at the address on p4.

Until next month...



Gill

Gill Shaw
Editor



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Find out what's happening in the canine world with Dogs Monthly!

RESCUE DOGS

Brindle prejudice

DOGS ARE OFTEN unfairly judged by their breed – and sometimes, according to the RSPCA, by their coat colour.

Over the last three years, the RSPCA needed an average of 41 days to find forever homes for the dogs in their care. Black and white dogs needed an average of 37 days to be rehomed, with black and tan dogs coming a close second with an average of 40 days.

However, that goes up to an average of 65 days for brindle dogs – 24 more than average.

Dog welfare expert Lisa Richards says, "It is a shame that some of our brindle dogs are being overlooked, particularly when their beautiful markings are matched by their brilliant characters. We think all dogs are beautiful and would urge people to look beyond the colour of the dogs to see their amazing personalities."

Hope Taylor, who adopted brindle dog Penny from RSPCA Felbridge centre in County



Durham, says, "We are over the moon with Penny and would not change her for the world. We always knew we would adopt a rescue dog and Penny has

brought so much to our lives. I would recommend anyone considering getting a pet to visit their nearest rescue centre, as there are so many more dogs needing loving homes. It is a shame that some brindle dogs are being overlooked, as we think Penny is beautiful."

Among the many brindle dogs in the RSPCA's care there is a whole litter of pups – three male and two female – found in a litter bin on Chester Road East, in Queensferry, Flintshire. They were so young that some of them had their umbilical cords still attached. They are now being cared for, and will hopefully be off to loving homes as soon as possible, regardless of their coat colour.

"Brindle dogs – like all our rescue dogs – can make great family pets," says Lisa Richards. "We think their distinctive markings are just as special as any other coat colour."



CANINE CARE

Parasite confusion is endemic

TREATING PARASITES is essential for canine health – but, according to research by Ceva Animal Health, dog owners have very confused ideas about what is required.

The research showed that more than 60 per cent of pet owners, despite using treatments not meant for ticks, believed their pets to be protected from the parasite. The same percentage thought their homes were protected against flea eggs and larvae – although they were using products with no insect growth regulator (IGR) that prevents flea eggs from hatching and larvae from developing into adult fleas.

Over a third of the 536 dog and cat owners questioned believed their pets to be protected against lungworm, not realising that their chosen anti-parasitic did not provide such protection.



To make things simpler for confused dog owners, the Ceva Protection System for dogs has been launched – a two-step solution to provide comprehensive protection with one monthly topical treatment and one flavoured tablet, along with a household flea spray for the pet's home environment.

Ask your veterinary practice for more information on the Ceva Protection System.

The nation's ideal dog is revealed

WHILE THE POPULARITY of 'handbag' dog breeds is at an all-time high, some native British breeds are not faring so well. The Kennel Club's list of vulnerable native breeds features 28 breeds at the moment – the Queen's beloved Pembroke Welsh Corgi having just joined the list. Six more breeds, including the English Setter and the Old English Sheepdog, are on the 'at watch' list.

Still, according to a survey of 2,000 dog owners, commissioned by Frontline, the UK is indeed a nation of traditional British dog lovers – with very specific characteristics in mind.

The ideal British dog happens to have the floppy ears of a King Charles Spaniel,

the body of a Border Collie, the short fur of a Bulldog, the snout of a Labrador, the golden colour of a Golden Retriever and the long, flowing tail of an Irish Setter.

Love for tradition extends to names, as Rover and Rex top the list of the most popular.

When it comes to the perfect size, tastes vary: while Londoners prefer small dogs, which are easier to handle in an urban environment, in other places – notably in the East Midlands – bigger companions are preferred.

While trying to imagine what the UK's Frankenstein dog would look like is amusing, here's hoping that our love for traditional native breeds will lead more people to give them a chance.



TOP 10 VULNERABLE NATIVE BREEDS

Otterhound
Smooth Collie
Skye Terrier
Sussex Spaniel
Field Spaniel

Glen of Imaal Terrier
Bloodhound
Curly Coated Retriever
Irish Water Spaniel
English Toy Terrier (Black and Tan)

PUPPY JUSTICE

Pet store forced to pay for sick pup's treatment

A PET STORE in Preston, Australia, was forced to pay out \$7,884 (over £4,000) for the life-saving surgery of Monte the Cavoodle. The pup was found to have a dangerous genetic condition called portosystemic shunt, a bypass of the liver by the body's circulatory system that keeps the blood from being cleansed.

While Monte seemed healthy when owners Sheree Bolton and Tara Mackay took him home at eight weeks old, within weeks he was in terrible pain. The surgery saved his life, but Monte will have to deal with the lifelong effects of his condition.

When Sheree and Tara first contacted the store, they were offered a refund or a replacement puppy. The couple refused, as Monte was a family member and certainly not some faulty appliance.

Victorian civil and administrative tribunal senior member Stella Moraitis agreed with them, and recognised that a refund simply wouldn't cut it when it came to the heartache Monte's owners went through.

"It's not like a car where you can go and get another one," Stella Moraitis said as she ordered the Pets Family store to pay for Monte's surgery and medical bills. "I can't ignore the fact that when you sell a dog, you sell a member of the family. If a child gets sick, you don't take it back to the hospital, do you?"

Should such rulings become commonplace, perhaps pet shops would be more concerned with the health of the pups they sell – although never buying a pup from a pet shop remains the best insurance against heartache.

FIVE-YEAR BAN

Breeder leaves bitch in labour for four days

A DOG breeder from Cramlington, Northumberland, has received a five-year ban from keeping dogs after she left her bitch in labour without assistance for four days, leading to the death of all 11 pups and nearly killing the mother as well.

Angela Gobin did nothing to help when her dog, Bella, went into labour last June. After the birth of a few pups and a few stillbirths, Bella stayed in labour for a total of four days before Angela – an experienced breeder – finally took her to the vet. The vets found more dead puppies still inside Bella, and

even a couple of maggots. None of the pups survived.

While prosecuting for the RSPCA, Denise Jackman said, "The defendant claims she wasn't concerned because, on the face of it, the dog was still eating and drinking and going to the toilet. There's not even a call to the vets to say, 'I have got this issue, what do you advise?'"

As Angela Gobin had plenty of previous experience in breeding, the prosecution found it unacceptable for a dog to be in labour for so long without any kind of intervention. She eventually received a six-week prison sentence, suspended for 12 months, a four-month curfew and a five-year ban on keeping dogs. She was also ordered to pay £580.

This is not the first time Angela Gobin has been sentenced for animal cruelty. In 2005 she left her elderly horse to starve to death in a field, and was banned from keeping horses for five years as a result.



FINAL RESPECTS

Strays attend the funeral of the woman who fed them

FRIENDS AND relatives of Margarita Suarez, a Mexican woman who passed away due to an illness, were left speechless when several dogs showed up at the funeral parlour – and not by chance.

For years, Margarita Suarez fed stray dogs and cats every day. According to her daughter, Patricia Urrutia, Margarita would feed up to 20 stray cats that showed up at her home, and any stray dog she encountered in the streets.

After several strays walked inside the funeral parlour and quietly sat down to join the wake, Margarita's family asked the staff if the dogs lived around there – but no member of staff had ever seen them before, leading Patricia to believe they were the strays her mother had cared for.

Believing that they were there to pay their respects to someone who had been their friend, Margarita's family and the staff allowed them to stay. The dogs even walked behind the hearse before returning to the funeral parlour, where they remained until their benefactor's body was prepared for cremation.



Pictures and a video of the strays' wake went viral, moving people all over the world. Hopefully, it also prompted someone from the area to look after the strays now that Margarita Suarez has gone.

BAIT FOUND

Dog poisonings: be alert to the dangers

COCKTAIL sausages laced with poison have been found hidden in the grass on the Cuckoo Trail, a popular walking spot in the Hailsham area, Sussex. The sausages were sliced open and filled with enough slug pellets to kill a dog before being left in the grass.



Hailsham police have issued a warning to dog owners in the area, releasing pictures of the poisoned sausages and advising owners to take extreme care while walking their dogs.

The RSPCA is "deeply concerned" by the news, and advises anyone who suspects their pet has been poisoned to take him to the vet immediately – if possible, with a sample of the substance ingested.

Previous cases of dogs poisoned on walks have been reported in the Brighton and Hove area, where six dogs so far have died.

The most common signs of dog poisoning include lethargy, loss of appetite, discoloured gums, vomiting, seizures, diarrhoea, nosebleeds and blood in the stool. If your dog is showing any of these symptoms, he should be taken to the vet at once.

STARVED STRAY

Wispa whispers: do you recognise this dog?

THE RSPCA IS appealing for information regarding Wispa, a young Staffordshire Bull Terrier cross found starved in a alleyway in Canvey Island, Essex, between First Avenue and Edith Close, on 2 April.

RSPCA inspector Caroline Richardson said, "I am amazed Wispa was still alive. He was so thin and in such an awful state. You could see all his ribs very clearly. We think he was probably abandoned somewhere and was walking and straying until he just collapsed."

Wispa, named after the chocolate as he was found around Easter, was wearing a lead and collar, but was not microchipped. Rescued by the RSPCA, he's recovering slowly thanks to constant veterinary care.

"He could not even get to his elbows to stand when he was brought in, but he is eating and drinking well and has already made such great progress over the weekend. He can sit up and hold his head now, which he couldn't before," Caroline said. "And he even had a short walk into the garden – which is amazing progress and more than we hoped for."

Anyone with any information regarding Wispa can call Caroline Richardson on 0300 123 8018.





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Be Open (Paw) minded

A revolutionary new rescue programme is saving lives – by training dogs to be adoptable and educating people to be the best owners possible, writes **Hannah Wynne**

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You've probably heard the stories of dogs remaining in rescue centres for years on end, tirelessly waiting for a family of their own to take them home. A project in America is striving to combat this problem by changing the way dogs are perceived in shelters, and fast-tracking their rehoming process.

Founded in 2000 in Berkeley, California, the volunteer training programme Open Paw was set up by Kelly Gorman Dunbar and Dr Ian Dunbar.

Open Paw helps people and animals build a lasting and successful relationship with one another and with their community. Kelly and Ian's vision is for rescue shelters to become pleasant, welcoming and quiet places that people can visit to rehome friendly, socialised and well-trained dogs who will live with them forever.

One of the ways this will be achieved is through the staff training and resident enrichment programme, which recommends that shelters also act as community education shelters. Here, pets will



learn basic manners, and be house-trained and socialised to people and other animals. With these skills, dogs will be better equipped to live in a home, and consequently appear more attractive to potential adopters.

At the same time, potential owners and the public can learn everything they need to know about what to expect when adopting an animal and how to care for them, so that the pet won't be surrendered to a shelter in the future.

Open Paw comes to the UK

On Christmas Eve, Radio 4's *You and Yours* programme aired a special edition devoted entirely to dogs. Weeks had been spent researching the issue of rescue on a global scale. It was a rare 45 minutes of in-depth discussion and the programme had sent a reporter to California to interview Kelly (pictured) and Ian Dunbar about Open Paw.

The National Animal Welfare Trust's (NAWT) CEO, Clare Williams, was listening and the concept of 'sending rescue dogs to university' struck a chord and she contacted Kelly immediately after the programme broadcast.

As a result, the National Animal Welfare Trust is to become the first in the UK to pilot the scheme and the charity is looking forward to sharing its progress at a later stage.

We train dogs to have pro-social behaviour, and teach them skills to be engaging and give soft and friendly eye contact to potential adopters.

Founder Kelly says, "We train dogs to have pro-social behaviour, and teach them skills to be engaging and give soft and friendly eye contact to potential adopters. Dogs need to be mentally and emotionally

healthy as well as physically healthy. When dogs arrive in kennels, stress levels usually peak after two weeks and the environment exacerbates their issues. It's important to get them rehomed as quickly as possible before they begin to deteriorate.

"Open Paw-trained dogs are usually adopted after only four weeks of being in a rescue because they are pro-social and know how to behave, engage with and impress a potential adopter.

"Some dogs are rambunctious, kennel crazy, and jump around to get noticed by adopters. Behaviour such as jumping around or cowering in the corner of their kennel can either be overwhelming for potential adopters, or cause them to pass by without meeting the dog properly. Open Paw teaches dogs to be calm and enriched from chewing a stuffed toy such as a Kong, so that adopters can imagine the dog in their home and be encouraged to adopt."

Kelly advocates teaching dogs simple tasks, such as to sit, stay, be handled, feel comfortable with chew toys, be hand fed, and become toilet trained. This should make dogs calmer and more presentable in rescue shelters.

Toilet training is particularly important, because time in a

Dogs & people

shelter can cause dogs to forget this skill. Just being taken for an elimination walk twice a day can make a huge difference, as it will deter dogs from toileting in their living spaces and minimise the mess that volunteers have to clean up.

The Open Paw training process uses positive reinforcement to train dogs, and owners are encouraged to continue the training methods at home.

Kelly is personally involved in offering intensive on-site workshops for shelters.

She says, "I personally conduct about 95 per cent of the workshops and have donated thousands of hours and dollars to the cause.

"Our shelter, volunteer, and owner educational materials are based on the best available evidence in animal behaviour, while remaining fun and easy to follow – so that even the most inexperienced animal handlers can raise beautifully behaved dogs and cats."

Case history: Manny

Manny, a 12-month-old Great Dane-German Shepherd Dog cross, was called 'Maniac' when he first arrived in the rescue centre, due to his high energy and excitable temperament. A large, 90lb dog, Manny's previous owner had loved play-fighting with him, so he was easily aroused around people and wanted to play roughly all the time!

Initially, Manny was boisterous and difficult for rescue centre volunteers to control and take for walks. The Open Paw programme was introduced to train him to be calm and relaxed in his kennel and to stop him tugging on his lead when taken out.

It took four months longer than usual to counter-condition Manny, but in the end he was adopted and found his forever home.

In another shelter without Open Paw, Manny may have slipped through the net and



been deemed too aggressive and difficult to work with to be rehomed, but with Open Paw, Manny has found the family he has always wanted.

Kelly says, "I would love to see more Open Paw shelters, and more shelters simply questioning their level of care and attitudes to companion animals. Open Paw provides the basic skills to succeed,

and is designed to be implemented on a shoestring.

"We just need volunteers with common goals to get involved, because it can help all volunteers and educate anyone who walks into the



Photo © National Animal Welfare Trust

shelter. It is a bare-bones, essential way to train dogs, which is palatable for the whole community.

"Change in terms of dogs being rehomed isn't happening as well as it should. Rehoming centres are homes for second chances; we just need a shift in how things are done." ●

Get involved

Open Paw is a non-profit organisation run solely by volunteers and 80 per cent of funds go directly to shelter grants for workshops and supplies.

To find out more about how to get involved, and to download the Open Paw training materials, visit www.openpaw.org

Summer shedding – it's grooming time!



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You may be beginning to notice more hair around the home with summer on the horizon, as your dog will be shedding his thick winter coat ready for the thinner summer coat to come through. We know how much you love your dog, but it can be frustrating to find excess hair on furniture and clothing. Well, FURminator can help...

Designed by a professional groomer, the FURminator deShedding tool is the top choice when it comes to preventing pets from shedding around the home. With regular use, 9 out of 10 dog owners confirm that they found less pet hair in the living area* so that clothes, sofas, carpets, and other furnishings can remain free from unsightly loose hair.

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Lean on me

Having animals enriches your life tremendously at times of crisis, writes sociologist **Laura Tucker**

Have you ever considered how much your pet means to you?

A number of years ago, I was in a road accident that left me confined to a wheelchair and suffering depression. It was only looking back, years later, that I realised my companion, Cocker Spaniel Milo, helped me on the road to recovery.

This experience led me to wonder whether pets had helped others recover from life-changing events and, if so, how this happened. For my research I interviewed nine people who had suffered cancer, bereavement, mental breakdown or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

I found that pets do help their guardians recover from life-changing events because they provide responsibility, closeness, routine, identification, empathy and unconditional love and affection.

UP CLOSE

People enjoyed being physically close to their pets, sharing their beds and sofas with their animal companions, and they appreciated their pets choosing to be close to them too. For many, it was one particular pet that provided comfort when they were ill.

Alison*, for example, fought cancer with the help of horse Delilah and dog Ben. She said, "This little horse put her head around my shoulder and she hugged me really tight and she nuzzled into me and I got on her back and I rode her and we just cried together... and Ben was my

constant companion. He slept in my bed, skin to skin. He would always lie right next to me and when I was in pain, he would put his head on my chest and across me. And although he was there for me, I don't think it was my dog who pulled me out of it, I think it was my horse."

MUTUAL SAVIOURS

Pets often gave their guardians a sense of purpose. Helen explained that her dog Percy "just means I get up in the morning; he means I've got a purpose. Because of having cancer, I no longer have the energy that I used to, so if I'm here on my own, it's just me and him. It means I've got somebody there to take care of, get out of bed for."

Others spoke about mutual caring between owner and pet, of the owner 'saving' the pet and the pet 'saving' the owner. Fred realised that Harvey, the dog he had rescued, had "had a hard life like I have", having been rehomed a number of times. Due to suffering PTSD, Fred found it hard to communicate with others, but he took charge of his life through the responsibility and love he felt for Harvey, who relied on him.

Harvey gave Fred a reason to get out of the house and was there to assist him through his recovery by acting as a 'social facilitator' when out on walks. As Fred explained, "Harvey has improved the quality of my life, and for the first time in a long time, that dog has made me feel comfortable in my own skin."

DEEP UNDERSTANDING

Many guardians felt their pet understood their illness. Louisa said her normally excitable dog understood when she was ill following cancer treatment.

"When I've been poorly, she knows, because even though she's such an energetic dog, she'll just lie all day on the bed with me and she won't bother me about a walk," she said.

Matt believed his dog diverted him from a potential suicide attempt. "There was an old railway bridge and I was going to go and have a look over the side at where I was going to jump. As I got there, Coco stopped and she wouldn't let me go any further and she physically dragged me away... I can't explain. It was really strange, but it was a defining moment for me."

When life is disrupted for whatever reason, companion animals can take on a new significance, providing empathy and assisting healing. Pets can assist recovery for those who share close bonds with them and Milo certainly did this for me. ●

CAN YOU HELP?

Laura Tucker, a sociologist and PhD student at the University of Warwick, is now conducting a study investigating how pets and service animals help military personnel who have sustained physical or mental injuries. To take part, or find out more, please email L.L.Tucker@warwick.ac.uk



When dogs become jobs ⑥

“The dog that made my career ‘canine’!”

In this series, we look at the dogs that have inspired a change of occupation, or led to a dream career involving our best friends. This month, **Claire Horton-Bussey** finds out how award-winning author HY Hanna achieved her creative ambition – thanks to a Great Dane called Honey...

HY Hanna is an award-winning author of children's fiction, and mysteries, romances and romantic suspense for adults. Under the pen name of Penelope Swan, she also writes a romantic Regency mystery series inspired by Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*.

But it is her pet fiction for which she is most well known. The Big Honey Dog Mysteries, based on her own Great Dane, have won the Moonbeam Children's Book Award and the Children's Literary Classics Book Award, and are popular internationally.

It's all a dream come true for Hsin-Yi, who has been animal mad for as long as she can remember.

“I think I was born an obsessive animal lover!” she says. “When I was three years old, my parents say I kept insisting that I wanted to be

a zookeeper when I grew up because that was the only way I thought I could get into the cage – closer to the animals. My favourite place was the zoo.”

Sadly, her parents didn't share her obsession.

“I was one of those sad children who was desperate



that she can now enjoy, living in Perth, Australia, so her love of animals was something of a curiosity to her family.

"My relatives and friends always thought I was a bit strange for being such a mad dog lover and used to tease me. I always said I'd rather have a dog than a diamond!" she recalls.

"I was particularly fascinated by dogs even though there is actually quite a lot of fear towards dogs in Asian culture and you're taught from a young age that 'dogs bite you' so you should always be careful and keep a safe distance from them.

"I grew up in the United Arab Emirates and dogs are not regarded very favourably in the Arab culture either, so there wasn't a lot of chance of exposure and interaction. We didn't move in the British expat circles which did have more doggie stuff."

So, without a dog of her own, Hsin-Yi had to find other ways to fulfil her doggie 'fix'. She had a dog encyclopaedia that she read obsessively, learning all the breeds, she devoured every dog magazine she could get her hands on, and she joined online dog forums.

Moving to the UK to study at

My relatives and friends always thought I was a bit strange for being such a mad dog lover and used to tease me. I always said I'd rather have a dog than a diamond! ,

Oxford, it's not surprising that Hsin-Yi chose to do Biological Sciences as her first degree.

"I actually always wanted to be a writer, particularly an author," she says. "It was my dream. But in the Asian culture, there are really only three acceptable jobs: doctor, lawyer and accountant – ha! OK, not quite, but being a 'creative' or an 'artist' was definitely not considered a proper job and so I was discouraged from following any kind of creative career. I only picked Biology because I loved animals and that seemed to be the degree that came closest. I never had any interest in being a scientist or anything like that.

"I then did a MA in Anthropology because having lived and grown up in so many different countries (born in Taiwan, lived in Hong Kong, London, New Jersey, Dubai...) and attended an international school and been exposed to a

lot of different cultures, I found the study of different cultures and human social evolution very interesting."

The highlight of being at Oxford wasn't the academic environment or dreaming spires – it was being able to attend Crufts and Discover Dogs each year!

"It was my one chance to see and interact with dogs, and ask questions of breeders, and research my future dog... I was in heaven!"

Knowing that a dog needs companionship above all else, Hsin-Yi had to continue being patient once she'd left home to study and then work. Working long hours, her choice of pet was limited – but not impossible.

"I resorted to all sorts of ridiculous things – like once, I found a slug in some cabbage I'd bought at the market and I lovingly kept him in a takeaway container, feeding



for a pet and was always begging my parents for a dog. I was always told 'maybe next year...' and when I got to about eight years old, I started to realise that 'next year' was probably never going to happen! So I promised myself that when I grew up and was independent, the first thing I would do was get a dog."

Taiwan, where Hsin-Yi was born, and the United Arab Emirates, where she spent most of her childhood, didn't have the same western pet culture

Dogs & people



him all sorts of choice greens and vegetables and fruit... he became a very fat slug!"

When the circumstances were finally right – just before her 30th birthday – Hsin-Yi's decades of research paid off. Settled in a house in New Zealand with husband Paul and working shorter hours, Hsin-Yi brought Great Dane puppy Honey home to share her life. Now she had the diamond *and* the dog!

"She was proof that good things are worth waiting for," says Hsin-Yi.

And with Honey came Lemon, a kitten as slim and teeny as Honey was huge and gangly!



"My husband had a similar story in that he always desperately wanted a kitten as a child but also had parents who weren't keen on pets – so when we got married, we agreed we'd get a puppy and kitten and have them grow up together."

Big in size and big in character, Honey marked a turning point in Hsin-Yi's life. Finally she was living the life she'd always wanted – except one piece of the jigsaw was missing...

"I taught English in language schools for a while, and then I worked for Oxford University Press as an education rep for

primary schools... I was trying really hard to do what was expected of me and work a 'proper' corporate job, but I was never really happy. I did think about writing a book when I was working in advertising in London and made some half-hearted attempts to start some novels, but never really took it very seriously because I still kept feeling guilty for doing something 'silly' that I wasn't supposed to be doing.

"Then I passed my 30th birthday – you know, you get that crisis-type moment where you wonder what you're doing with your life – and I decided I needed to get back to what made me really happy: writing. I saw a note in a dog magazine, asking for people to contribute an article about living with a Great Dane, and Honey was about 18 months by then, so I wrote an article about my experience being a first-time dog owner. I got some lovely feedback on that article and was offered more commissions.

"It built from there – I started approaching more magazines and getting commissions from different editors."

With a good stream of work coming in, Hsin-Yi took the plunge to quit her day job and

started working as a freelance writer full-time, which she did for five years.

"But I started itching to get back to my real love: fiction writing. I guess I was now older and more confident in myself; I decided I didn't care any more about doing the socially acceptable 'right thing' – so I started working on a novel again. That became my first published book, *Curse of the Scarab*, book one in the Big Honey Dog Mysteries."

Dog owners might know her better as Hsin-Yi Cohen, her married name, but her novels are published as HY Hanna – her maiden name.

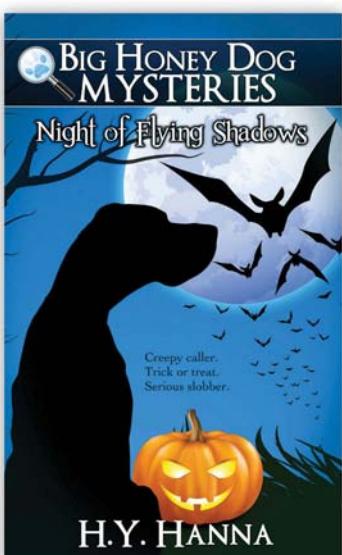
"I liked the idea of using my 'own' name because being an author was always a personal ambition – something from my early life, before I married. It felt like I was achieving it as 'me' – the little girl I had been when I had dreamt of being an author one day. I also thought that HY Hanna had an easier, more memorable ring to it – Hsin-Yi is so hard to spell and pronounce!"

There are now three books in the Big Honey series, aimed at eight- to 12-year-olds, and readers have fed back to her that they love the dog characters in the books, who are so incredibly lifelike. It seems that all those years spent poring over dog books and magazines has finally paid off!

"The mystery series features a Great Dane and her canine friends who go on exciting adventures and solve mysteries together," she explains. "They are all pet dogs so they still operate in the human world and their owners do play peripheral roles, but the stories are told from the dogs' perspective. It's sort of like *101 Dalmatians* meets *Nancy Drew*.

"When I was a child, I really loved books that starred animals – my favourites were stories like Felix Salten's *Bambi* (so different from the Disney version!), *Charlotte's Web*, *Watership Down*, *White Fang* ... I was also a mad Nancy Drew fan. So I wanted to write something that combined my love of dogs with my love of mysteries – and the Big Honey Dog Mysteries was born."

Honey is joined by her canine





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Dogs & people

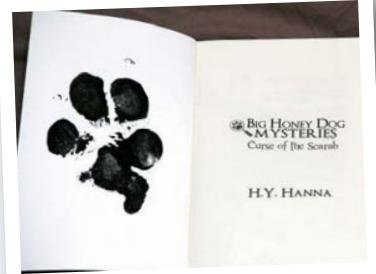


friends Suka the Siberian Husky, Ruffster the mongrel, Biscuit the Beagle, and Tyson the Jack Russell Terrier, and there are also 'guest appearances', such as a rescue Pit Bull named Max, who features in the first book.

"Max is ostracised by the other dogs and instantly blamed when puppies start disappearing from the neighbourhood. I feel very strongly about breed-specific discrimination and I wanted to show how unfair it is to judge dogs (or people) based on stereotype and breed (racial) prejudice. I didn't want to lecture – I wanted to do it through a story. Max is despised by everybody for being a Pit Bull and yet by the end, he shows what being a hero really means. It's a very moving ending, which has had grown men writing to me, telling me it brought them to tears!"

Sadly, Honey died at the age of grand age of 10, leaving a huge hole in Hsin-Yi's heart and life. But she lives on in her books and continues to have a large fan base.

"Honey had a very popular blog and I was overwhelmed



If you'd like to be transported to Australia from your sofa, here's your chance! We have two copies of all Hsin-Yi's books to give away – two sets of the Honey Dog Mysteries, and two sets of the Summer Beach Vets series.

Big Honey Dog Mysteries (for kids 8-12 years and dogs lovers of all ages)

- *Curse of the Scarab*
- *A Secret in Time*
- *The Holiday Collection* (Halloween, Christmas & Easter mystery box set)

Summer Beach Vets (Escape Down Under) – sweet romances for pet lovers

- *Playing for Love*
- *Playing to Win*
- *Playing by Heart*
- *Playing the Fool*

Just write to us at the usual Dogs Monthly address (see page 4), marking your entry either 'Big Honey Dog Mysteries' or 'Summer Beach Vets'. Winners will be picked at random; closing date 5 June 2015. Good luck!

by the response from people around the globe when she died. I had over 600 condolence emails on the first day! I had no idea she touched so many people and so many had enjoyed her blog and her videos on YouTube. They also loved the version of her in the books. I had actually managed to publish the first two books in the Big Honey Dog Mysteries before Honey died and so she gained many more new (young) fans through them.

"The books have been a wonderful way to immortalise Honey – she lives on through the series and all the people who have enjoyed her adventures. She even lives on on the covers – literally – because each of the Great Dane silhouettes on the covers are all taken from photos of Honey."

Lemon, too, has died now, so moggie Muesli is the only pet in the household at the moment. It won't stay this way forever, but Hsin-Yi isn't immediately jumping straight back into dog ownership.

"I don't want to get a dog just to have a dog – I want to wait until the right time and the right dog. Honey was a huge presence and touched so many people's lives. She's a very hard act to follow – I

think it would be unfair to the next dog – so it's good to have some time in between and have proper closure."

HEAVY PETTING

So, for the time being, Hsin-Yi's dog fix is being achieved through her work. And it's not just in the Big Honey series that pets feature prominently – her Summer Beach Vets series for adults also feature our furry friends.

"These are feel-good romances for dog lovers. I noticed that in a lot of reviews for books that had dogs on the covers, people often complained the dog played such a small role in the story and they wished the dog had been featured more... so I thought it would be fun to write a series of romances where the dog is as much a character as the main couple and plays a role in getting them together.

"Summer Beach Vets is set in an Australian seaside town and features hunky Aussie vets and a cute dog guest star in each book. Aside from the cute pet aspect, the books feature colourful slang, native wildlife and beautiful beach scenery – it's a glimpse into the Aussie way of life – a chance to travel to Australia right from your sofa!"

For more information about the books and H.Y. Hanna, visit www.hyhanna.com

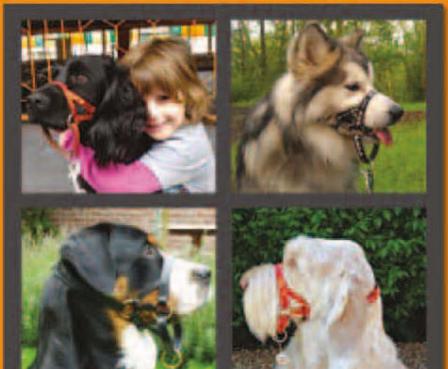


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Training a Hearing Dog 11

Birthday boy

We all like a bit of a fuss on a significant birthday and Jasper, who's always up for any amount of fuss, is no exception. But this month the poor boy missed his own first birthday celebrations. While eight playmates gathered in his honour for a romp in the woods, followed by homemade doggie birthday cake, Jasper found himself at the vet's.

"He kept being sick," puppy socialiser Lynda McGregor tells me. "They thought he might have a blockage, so he had to spend the day there – not that he minded; he went off with the nurse without a backward glance!"

Meeting up with Lynda and Jasper at The Grange, Hearing Dogs' Buckinghamshire HQ, I find the birthday boy looking as bright as a button and

keenly interested in the slice of cake his pals kindly – OK, reluctantly – saved for him.

"In the end, it was decided he'd just eaten something he shouldn't," Lynda says, which brings to mind a recent chewing incident with unexpected consequences.

"He snaffled my specs from the kitchen work surface and managed to get the lenses out of them!" she recalls.

While she and Jasper were at the optician's, waiting for the glasses to be repaired, Lynda got chatting to another customer, who was much taken with him. The next day, Lynda heard from the volunteering department that a lady had just signed up to sponsor a puppy – after meeting a gorgeous Hearing Dog in training at the optician's...

"So some good came out of

his naughtiness," Lynda laughs, "although I'm not telling Jasper that!"

It isn't the first time Lynda and Jasper have inspired others to get involved with the

charity. Jasper's bestest buddy, a seven-month-old Miniature Poodle called Gus, is owned by Nancy Neville, who has become interested in finding a voluntary role with Hearing

Jasper celebrates his birthday at home with Lynda.





Dogs since getting to know our roving ambassadors.

Perhaps with an eye to future volunteers, Lynda has also taken Jasper along to a nursery school. I take my hat off to anyone willing to have a crack at explaining what hearing dogs are all about to a roomful of three- and four-year-olds, but Lynda was unfazed.

"I kept the talk short," she says. "I got the children to put their fingers in their ears to help them understand what being deaf might be like. They all stroked Jasper and had their photo taken with him – he was in his element!"

Lynda and Jasper are at The Grange today for their fortnightly training class and Lynda tells me they're now putting in extra work with trainer Kelly Maguire on the first stage of sound work.

"We put a treat on top of a kitchen timer and set it for five seconds," she explains. "When the timer goes off, Jasper is encouraged to approach it and is then rewarded by finding the treat and, of course,

he's given plenty of praise."

The next stage of the exercise will be to increase the number of seconds' delay and the treat will come from Lynda.

Jasper is getting the hang of the new 'game' and it's this willingness and ability to learn, together with his calm and friendly nature, that's led to him being considered as a potential stud dog.

Speaking to the charity's national dog supply manager, Alex Stafford-Clark, I learn that Jasper was brought to the attention of the breeding scheme staff at his eight-month assessment.

"He was singled out as being a confident, biddable dog with a sociable nature," Alex tells me. "These are the kinds of traits we look for in a hearing dog and this, combined with good looks and no obvious health problems, made him an excellent character to review again as a potential stud dog."

Alex will carry out an assessment by going out and about with Jasper and meeting lots of people and children.

"Then I'll make a final decision and, if he's considered

suitable, he'll have some breed-specific health tests to check he's genetically sound to breed from."

Lynda admits that in her heart of hearts she'd really like Jasper to be someone's hearing dog, but producing lots of little Jaspers would be the next best thing! ●

Next month: In the final instalment of Jasper's diary, find out what his future holds...



Jasper's birthday cake

You will need:

1 cup flour
1 tsp bicarbonate of soda
1 cup grated carrots
1/4 cup vegetable oil
1/4 cup peanut butter (with no added salt/sugar)
1/3 cup honey
1 egg
Optional: dog biscuits for decoration, mashed banana, more peanut butter or a little cream cheese



Preheat the oven to 350F (180C).

Mix together the flour and bicarbonate of soda. Add the grated carrots, oil, honey, peanut butter and egg and mix well. Pour into a non-stick cake tin and bake for 40 minutes.

When cooled, you can either slice the cake into two layers and fill with mashed bananas or peanut butter, or frost the top with mashed banana or a small amount of cream cheese and decorate with dog biscuits.

Store in an airtight container in the fridge.

Please note: This American recipe (hence the 'cup' measurements) should only be fed in very small portions and strictly on special occasions! Because of the high fat content, it may not be suitable for all dogs, particularly those prone to digestive upsets or who have pancreatic problems.

About the author



Debbie Bridges lives in Hertfordshire with her husband, two chickens, an elderly cat, her walking companion and best friend Java, a 12-year-old German Shepherd Dog, and part-time boarder Ruby, a Lurcher X Labrador.

An animal lover squeezes seven decades of memories into a must-read book for everyone who cares about the welfare of all creatures great and small...



Memoirs of a Party Animal

An animal lover since birth, Angela Humphrey organised her first fundraising in her parents' garden when she was only a child – raising the whopping amount of £4, about £228 today, for the PDSA (People's Dispensary for the Sick Animals of the Poor). It was the beginning of a 75-year commitment to animal welfare, which won her a lifetime achievement award from Ceva Animal Health and is now the

subject of her book, *Memoirs of a Party Animal*.

Born in 1930, Angela began trying to hug, kiss and pat every dog she saw, before she could even walk.

"I would nearly fall out of my pram in an attempt to pet every dog I saw on the streets," she recalls. "My mother was quite worried I'd get bitten, and kept trying to hold me back. It didn't work!"

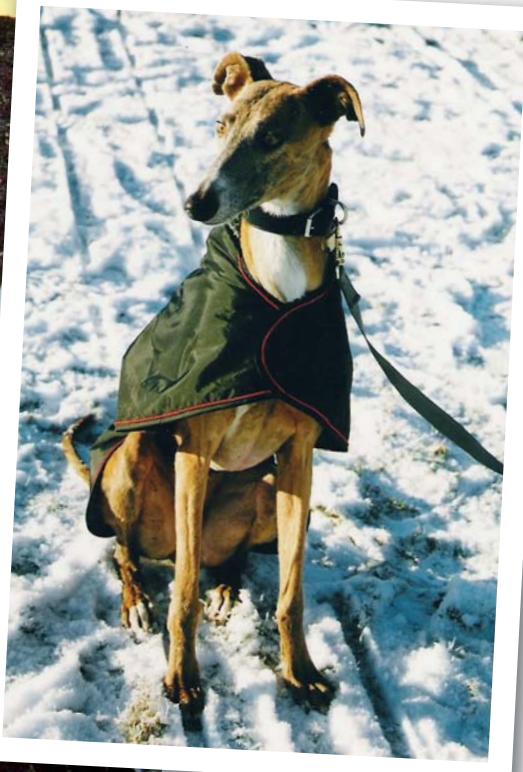
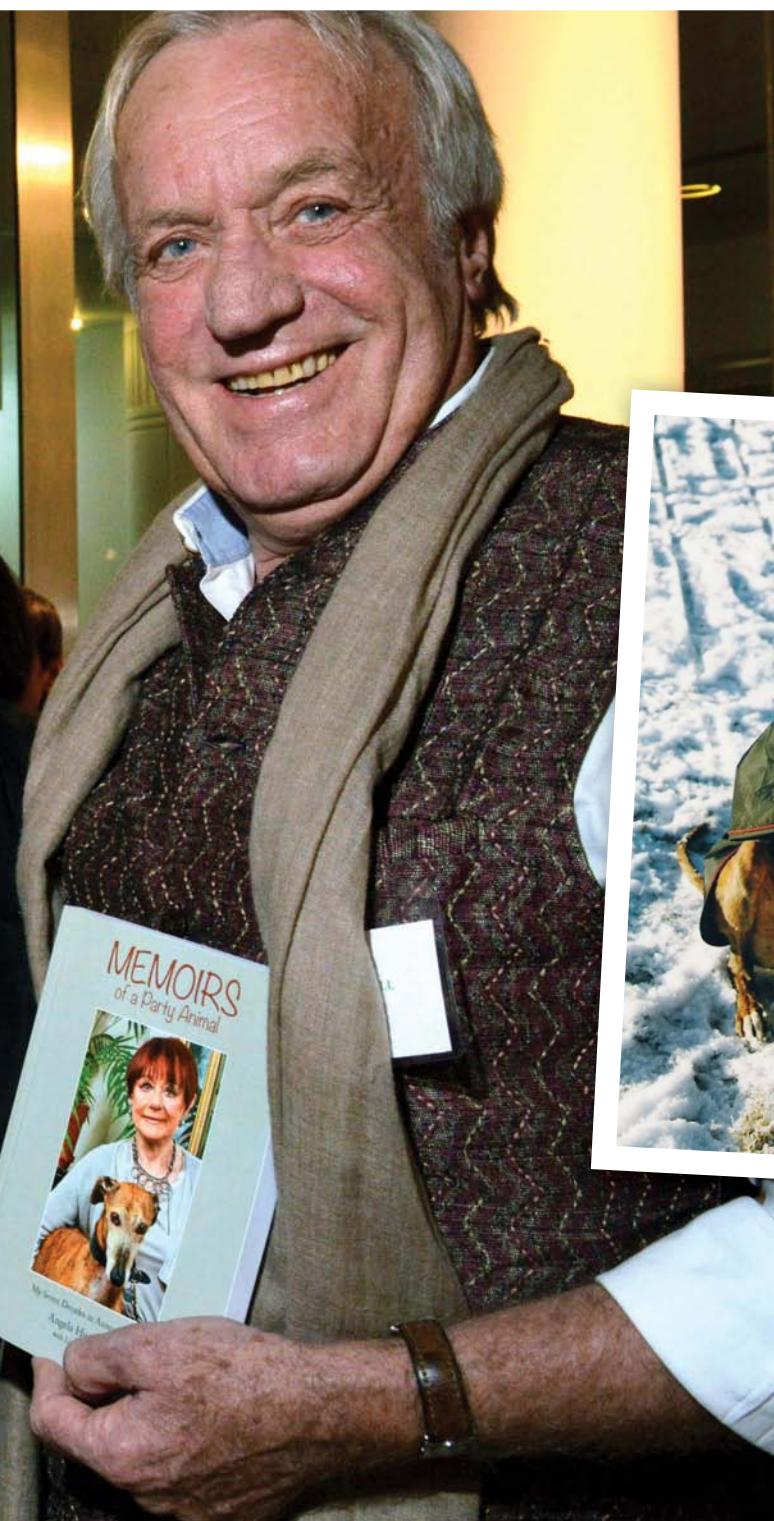
Brought up in an urban environment, Angela first

witnessed animal cruelty at the beginning of the Second World War – when she and her family went to stay on a farm in Wales to escape the bombings. Angela's idealised notion of farm life was shattered the morning after the family's arrival.

"I was awakened by dreadful noises and screeches. I looked out of the window and I saw the farmers cutting off the testicles of pigs and calves with a knife – no anaesthetic

involved," she says. "I joined my first animal charity shortly afterwards."

For more than 70 years afterwards, Angela has campaigned tirelessly against animal cruelty everywhere – for abandoned or ill-treated dogs or horses, bears bred for their bile or made to dance, zoo animals, farm animals, ducks and geese bred for foie gras, working animals, elephants and rhinos slaughtered for their tusks or



horns, and animals bred for their fur or feathers.

As a travel writer, she spent years journeying across the world to tell the stories of abused animals – and yet one of the rescues she recalls most fondly was that of a capuchin monkey called Joey, who had been imprisoned for a decade in a house in Hampstead right across from her own.

Angela says, “Joey was kept in a cage for so long, without sunlight or company, with no

proper exercise or food. He was too crippled even to climb: his bones were so brittle and damaged, he was folded over himself like a little armadillo. I decided to sponsor him before even finding out which house in my neighbourhood he came from. He was so close to me, suffering for so long – if only I had known!”

Now 15 years old, Joey spends his days at The Monkey Sanctuary Trust in Cornwall, enjoying his new home and

Wild animals should never be kept as pets; they're not like a dog or a cat. And to think that there are an estimated four or five thousand of such animals kept as pets in the UK!

features Joey's story and more – countless animal anecdotes from around the world during Angela's years as a travel writer. There is much about dogs as well – from wild dogs in Africa to domestic dogs here in the UK.

Angela's own dogs are rescued 'galgos' – native hunting and coursing Greyhounds of Spain. Many galgos suffer a cruel fate after the hunting season ends – either destroyed by owners who don't wish to feed them until the next hunting season, or abandoned to their fate. Their plight is highlighted in the UK by the charity Greyhounds in Need, founded in 1998 by Anne and Arthur Finch and of which Angela's husband, Martin, is chair.

Percy, Angela's current dog, was rescued thanks to Greyhounds in Need. Abandoned at the end of the hunting season in Spain, the starving dog was found injured after he had tried to eat the bait in a fox trap. It took a long time for the traumatised dog to relax, but patience and TLC did the trick. Percy is now a happy lad – and the gorgeous boy you can see with Angela on the cover of her book! ☺

life, and Angela still regularly visits him.

“Wild animals should never be kept as pets; they're not like a dog or a cat,” she says. “And to think that there are an estimated four or five thousand such animals kept as pets in the UK!”

Memoirs of a Party Animal



● *Memoirs of a Party Animal* is available for £7.99 for the print version and £5.99 for the e-book. All profits from sales will be given to the 50 animal charities Angela currently supports.

● To find out more about Greyhounds in Need, visit www.greyhoundsinneed.co.uk

The Secrets of Pet Insurance

Continuing on from last month's feature, pet insurance guru **Neil Flint** reveals more of the industry secrets that could save you money and heartache

In the last issue, we looked at the first four secrets, as revealed in my new book, *The 21 Secrets of Pet Insurance*. I explained the difference between lifetime cover, maximum cover and 12-month cover, and explained the serious implications of choosing the wrong level of protection at the wrong time.

Secret 5



Free cover for your new pet

One of the many calls we get at the Vet Insurance Protector (VIP) office is from owners who have just collected their new pup and found an insurance offer in their accompanying puppy pack. Everyone likes a bargain, so a free four-week policy can be a very tempting offer – but is it the right offer for your pet?

Often, these policies mean that once you activate them, you will be covered immediately for accidents and third-party claims. However, the illness cover of the policy often does not come into force until the inception period, usually two weeks, is over.

Inception periods for illnesses, whether on a free

four-week cover or on a full pet insurance policy, exist to stop people abusing the system. A pet owner may spot symptoms in their pet and take out insurance cover just in case it will be needed for a claim before taking their pet to the vet. So what you thought was four weeks of full protection is, in fact, only two weeks of protection. Not so much of a freebie now.

Companies who provide free puppy cover offer it in the hope that you will renew your cover with them once the free period ends. They are banking on you being lazy and just continuing with them to avoid having to make an effort to look for an alternative policy. This is great if you are being offered the right policy for you and your pet, but how do you know that you are?

With a lively puppy finding his feet, having pet insurance in place from the start is a must for most people. What you don't want is your puppy developing a condition while you are on that free four-week cover, as that means you are then stuck with that provider, even if it is the wrong policy, or risk transferring to another provider which will place an

exclusion on the policy and you will be left footing the bill.

It is also worth bearing in mind that if you do transfer to another provider to ensure you have the right policy, you will also have to go through another inception period, which may leave you without any cover and in a vulnerable position.

However, some breeders and rescue centres may provide free four-week cover that does provide immediate protection for accident and illness. This can give you time to research and choose the best cover available for your budget. Even with immediate cover, you must check the detail to ensure it is the cover it claims to be.

I would always recommend lifetime cover so you're insured for any condition your dog may develop, now and in the future. You can actually start a full policy for a puppy from the age of eight weeks, which is around the time most pet owners bring their new puppy home anyway, so it makes sense to go straight to a full policy and ensure you and your pet are fully protected and that freebie won't end up being a costly mistake.

The secret: free cover is not always a bargain!

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FINAL

1. All analyses performed

Dogs & people

Secret 6



Excesses

This is an area where there are huge disparities between insurers.

The excess is the amount you have to pay if you make a claim on your insurance. If you need to make a claim for your pet, the insurer will deduct the amount of excess you have to pay from the settlement of your claim. You must be aware that if treatment is ongoing, then an excess may be deducted at the start of every policy year, if you have the right type of cover.

Some insurers offer a flat rate of excess and some offer a flat rate plus an added percentage, either right from the start of the policy or once your pet reaches a certain age. These percentages can range from 10 per cent to a mind-numbing 35 per cent! You have to be aware that both the flat rate and/or the added percentage may be increased by your insurer over a period of time.

The table at the bottom of the page helps to show the impact this can have on claims.

If Insurer B then increases the excess because your pet is now eight years old to 35 per cent, then your £3,000 claim has an excess of £1,115 in cash terms.

These are only a couple of examples – there are too many permutations of excesses to explain here – but you should get the gist that excesses are not straightforward and can be hidden in the small print, causing confusion and disappointment for policyholders.

The excess on a claim can easily run out of control. Imagine you have a dog with an ongoing problem and he passes the age of eight with a 35 per cent excess on a claim of £5,000 for the year (a claim size we regularly see). Then your excess would be a mind boggling £1,750!

There's more bad news here... Most of these insurers also have the cheek to increase your premium so you could end up paying such a high premium and excess that you can't afford the insurance you have to pay, as you don't know if the problem will recur.

Excesses are confusing with myriad possible amounts you might need to pay, but this is an area we enjoy tackling for our clients and have a great history of getting right.

The secret: watch the excess, as it can end up making a cheap policy very costly in the future.

Secret 7



How insurers consider some conditions to be related

Many people are not aware of this clause, so to help you understand, I'm going to relate a story we regularly hear from disgruntled policyholders.

"My dog had a cruciate ligament injury and I claimed £3,500 on my pet insurance policy, which has a £5,000 limit per condition. However, when my dog damaged his other cruciate ligament, which again cost £3,500, I was informed I only had £1,500 left to claim, as it is classed as the same condition even though it was a different leg and occurred over 12 months later."

At this point, the pet owner is informed by the insurer that not only do they have to pay the £2,000 shortfall for the second cruciate operation, but any arthritis in the future arising from the cruciate problems will also have to be funded by them, as their insurer will class this as a related condition.

Most policyholders wrongly believe three separate claims are involved: one for the first leg, another for the second leg, and a third for the arthritis, when it is actually all part of the same claim, even

though it's a different leg and arthritis is a separate condition occurring at different times. The insurers say it's because the second cruciate problem occurred as a result of the first cruciate problem and the extra pressure put on the other leg, therefore making it related. And also that the arthritis is most likely a result of the cruciate damage and, therefore, again related.

Of course, if you have lifetime cover in place, then the above scenario will not apply to you, as all conditions, whether related or not, will be covered. However, as cruciate problems often result in large claims, some insurers do have limitations within their lifetime cover. Again, you need to look into the detail.

The main policyholders that will suffer with related conditions are the ones with the 12-month and maximum-benefit cover. In summary, people with 12-month cover just run out of any form of cover after 12 months, so such a policy is fairly useless for this problem other than for diagnosis and initial treatment.

Maximum-benefit cover does not fare much better, as when you reach your limit of cover, that's it – you have nothing left. If you're lucky, you might be able to claim for the majority of the cruciate injuries, but you can look forward to an expensive ongoing arthritis bill for the rest of the pet's life. This often means permanent expensive medication, regular blood tests to ensure the medication is not causing other problems, and regular check-ups with the vet.

Don't be under the illusion that cruciate ligaments and resulting arthritis are the only related conditions; there are many. For example, if your pet has a tummy problem that is diagnosed as a food allergy, and your pet then goes on to develop a skin irritation or ear infection also due to developing an allergy, then either of these conditions may be linked back to the original stomach problem.

The secret: lifetime cover is the only solution to ensuring related conditions will always be covered.





It's our catch of the day...

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Dogs & people

Secret 8



Alternative therapies

Alternative therapies, such as acupuncture, hydrotherapy, homoeopathy and chiropractic manipulation, can usually be covered by pet insurance, but it is always worth checking to see what is and isn't covered by an insurer and, if alternative treatments are included, how much cover you have.

Some insurers do not cover any alternative treatment, some have a limit within the level of the illness or injury cover of your policy, and some provide a separate amount of cover just for alternative treatment. This amount can vary from company to company; most usually cover an additional amount of around £1,000, but sometimes limitations are

Further help

I need advice on pet insurance for my pet. What should I do?

You can call the Vet Insurance Protector (VIP) office on 0845 601 8575 or 01642 552188 and discuss your options with a trained adviser. Alternatively, you can submit your details on the VIP website <http://vip4u.co.uk/index.php/quote.html> and an adviser will contact you.

What are the benefits of becoming a VIP client?

As a VIP client we will monitor your policy to ensure that your pet is always on the right level of cover; assist you with any queries regarding your policy or claims; contact the insurer on your behalf to save you having to go through a call centre; provide you with any paperwork you require (claim forms, copy of policy documents and so on); liaise with your vet if you need to make a claim; and look at alternative policies to meet your budget requirements if your personal situation changes.

given within this – for example, 10 hydrotherapy sessions per condition.

It is always worth checking what the cover is because if your pet experienced a cruciate ligament injury, say, then hydrotherapy may be needed to strengthen the leg to help with recovery. This may mean you have no cover, which could lead to a costly bill, or the scenario of your pet not being able to have the treatment if you can't afford to fund it yourself.

The secret: alternative treatments aren't always included in a policy and some have limitations.

Secret 9



Reporting a claim

Most companies will have a set time limit for a claim to be reported to them or for a completed claim form to be returned to them. This can range anywhere from 14 days to 12 months from diagnosis depending on the insurance company, although the majority request claim forms within 60 days.

Some companies also request that you inform them before treatment is carried out on your pet, which may delay vital treatment in an emergency situation. Some may also insist that you register the claim within a certain period and then give you time to return the completed form. Some insurance companies are strict with the timescale and some are not, so make sure you know your provider's rules.

Some of the calls we receive at VIP relating to the timescale for submitting claims complain about vets charging to complete the necessary claim form. For a one-off treatment, paying your vet to complete a claim form does not seem unreasonable, but I have heard of vets charging the fee every time a claim form is completed, even if it is for a monthly medication claim. In this instance, it would be worth checking with your insurer to see if you could submit three or four months of invoices at a time with just one claim form to keep down your costs. Not all vets charge this administration

fee, but not many insurers will pay it for you, so this may be a cost payable by you.

The secret: if a claim is not received within the required time, this may mean it won't be paid.

Secret 10



Vaccinations

If you choose not to vaccinate your dog on an annual basis, you need to check with your insurance company if you will still be covered. Some insurers may not cover your pet in the event of an accident or illness even if it has nothing to do with any illness that can be vaccinated against. I know of insurers that will not pay any claims, even for a broken leg.

Other insurers will continue to offer cover for anything that is not linked to those conditions that can be vaccinated against. Some companies may provide cover if there is a medical reason why your pet cannot be vaccinated – for example, if your pet has reacted to a vaccination in the past, and your vet does not recommend revaccinating.

If you choose to provide homoeopathic nosodes as an alternative to regular vaccinations, this should also be checked with your insurer, as some companies may not accept this as an alternative and this could void any claims.

The secret: if you do not vaccinate your pet, some insurers will not pay out for any claims – no matter what the claim is for! ●

Next month: Neil shares some more of his insurance secrets.

About the author



Neil Flint is a pet insurance expert who has helped thousands of pet owners insure their pets appropriately. He has

advised the BBC and helped write numerous articles for the national press. He has allowed *Dogs Monthly* to serialise his new book, *The 21 Secrets of Pet Insurance*.

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Dogs & people



Marnee and Noel (far right) and their fellow finalists receive their awards at Crufts.

Pat on the back

All therapy dogs deserve recognition for the incredible work they undertake – but there can be only one winner in the HiLife Pets As Therapy Dog of the Year competition...

Marnee, an 11-year-old Golden Retriever, was judged this year's Pets As Therapy Dog of the Year and was crowned at Crufts in March, along with her owner, Noel Austin, of Crowborough, East Sussex.

Having been a Pets As Therapy dog since she was only nine months old, Marnee has spent almost all of her life helping others. Noel and Marnee are part of a team of dogs and owners who

regularly volunteer their time, providing therapeutic visits to hospitals, hospices, nursing and care homes, and schools for children with special educational needs.

Noel said, "Despite only being a young puppy, Marnee took to her role immediately and has since spent more than a decade making people happy. It's nice for Marnee's efforts to be recognised, but I think all Pets as Therapy dogs are winners. We've certainly enjoyed our big day."

Pets As Therapy is a national charity founded in 1983. Its volunteers visit many different establishments taking their own dogs and cats with them – provided they're friendly, vaccinated and temperament-tested. There are now about 4,500 active visiting dogs and 108 cats at work in the UK. One wagging tail at a time, they work to provide animal-assisted therapy and bring comfort to thousands of people every week.

Marnee has worked within



stroke rehabilitation, bringing comfort to a dog-phobic girl, and helped those with mental and physical disabilities, people with a phobia of hospitals, children with autism and adults with severe dementia.

The other finalists in this year's competition were Islay, a Miniature Schnauzer who regularly visits Dove House Hospice in Hull; Chief, a Border Collie who visits primary schools in Merseyside; Gunner, a German Shepherd Dog who brings comfort in various care homes in Kent; Lily, who brings joy to young adults with mental and physical disabilities; and Kahlea, who regularly visits four different care homes.

With so many amazing dogs competing for the title, the winner was uncertain until the very end – and Noel couldn't believe it when Marnee's name was called.

"I was thrilled to be notified of her nomination and presented with the opportunity for her to take a turn in the spotlight at Crufts," she said. "For Marnee

to be announced as the overall winner is absolutely unbelievable; we're both delighted."

HiLife's Peter Parkinson said, "All the dogs and their handlers perform sterling work in their local communities, helping people who are in desperate need of a little comfort, performing their duties from the goodness of their hearts. Marnee is a very worthy winner and I'm delighted her work has been recognised."

After received a cheque for £500 and three months' supply of HiLife dog food as a prize, Noel still had some trouble getting her head around the fact she and Marnee had won.

"It's not sunk in yet," she says. "Everyone back home will be delighted when we get back and tell them the fabulous news. Lots of friends and the people we visit have been eagerly awaiting the final. They'll be stunned when we tell them we've actually won."

To find out more about becoming a Pets As Therapy volunteer, visit www.petsastherapy.org or call 01844 345445.

All the dogs and their handlers perform sterling work in their local communities, helping people who are in desperate need of a little comfort, performing their duties from the goodness of their hearts.



There are thousands of Pets as Therapy volunteers and their amazing dogs in every part of the country. Meet just a few of them here...

Cynthia Milnes

I am a Pets As Therapy visiting volunteer, and also a co-ordinator. This involves looking after about 35 volunteers. I arrange for a dog to be assessed by a trained assessor. I then find suitable placements for the successful candidates to visit. I stress that the dog's well-being must be the priority. For example, a quiet, gentle dog would probably not be happy in a school of noisy children, but OK working one-to-one with a pupil on the Read2Dogs project.

Volunteers visit diverse establishments, such as care homes, schools, hospices, hospitals and prisons. They also work with dog-phobic



adults and children.

We have all types of dogs and all have their merits. The Havanese is tiny and easy to pick up and place close to a patient, and our Greyhounds,

He has an unusual coat, as his rump is in cords called 'cadenettes' and patients find it therapeutic to run their fingers through them. He loves the visits as much as the patients do and very quickly taught himself to work the room and approach everyone. He willingly presses himself close to the patients so they can fuss him.

One resident screamed when she saw him for the first time and wanted him to stay away. I kept my distance but, over time, she got used to him. Feeding him titbits made her laugh – the carers had never seen her laugh or smile before. Very soon this lady was following us around the residential home as we visited everyone.

Dogs & people

Rebecca Wears



This is Izzy. She's a five-year-old Labrador and she's been a Pets As Therapy dog for nearly four years. We started volunteering because when Izzy was around a year old, she matured from a hyperactive puppy into a really loving, caring adult dog and I wanted to share that with other people.

Every week we visit a nursing home for residents with dementia and a school for children with autism. Izzy is loved by everyone she visits – students, residents and staff – and brings a smile to everyone's face.

Izzy loves her work and gets very excited when she realises she's off on one of her visits. I also love the work we do, as seeing people's reactions makes me smile, knowing that Izzy has brought a bit of happiness to their day.

Izzy has made a real difference to many people. In the nursing home, residents who were once quiet and withdrawn now look forward to Izzy's visit and will happily sit and stroke her, asking questions about her and telling stories of pets they have had.

Students in the school adore Izzy and love her smile and wagging tail. She will sit patiently while she is stroked by the children, and students who are afraid of dogs are now stroking Izzy and gaining confidence.

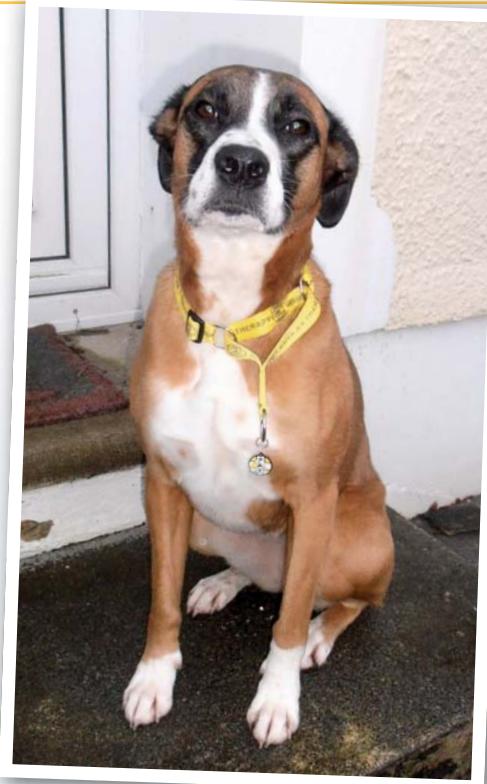


Patricia Kelly

I got Rolo as an eight-week-old pup in October 2008. I was a volunteer for Riding for the Disabled for 29 years until I retired and Rolo came with me to the stables and met many people, children and adults with various disabilities and he just loved them. He was so gentle and would put his head on someone's knee if they were in a wheelchair.

When he was 10 months old he passed his Pets As Therapy assessment and we started visiting The Elms Day Centre when he was about 11 months old. He has been doing this every week for the last five years.

It is lovely to meet the people who have had dogs in the past and hear their stories, and they appreciate being able to have interaction with a dog and stroke him and give him a treat. I think it is very worthwhile and brings so much to the people who live on their own but cannot have a dog.



Joelle Hoggan

Bella is a Boxer cross whom we adopted from

Many Tears Animal Rescue at just six months old. Her friendly, confident nature and her enthusiastic love of all types of people made us think she'd be ideal as a Pets As Therapy dog, and in 2013 we put her forward for assessment. She passed with flying colours, and we soon began visiting a residential home for elderly people.

Many of the residents there have dementia, and it is very humbling to witness an unresponsive person come to life when Bella gently nudges their hand with her nose. Others respond to her as if she is their dog, and relive past antics. One gentleman talks to her about "When we saw that badger..." and "When we walked over the mountain" with a huge smile on his face.

The residents enjoy getting Bella to sit and shake hands, and wait for her treat, so we take a supply of dog biscuits or they'd give her their custard creams! Bella's visits are eagerly anticipated, and she loves it too, getting excited when she sees her special collar.

If you have a calm, friendly, biddable dog, it's a great scheme, and hugely rewarding.



Megan Taylor

Ruby is a five-year-old Border Collie-Kelpie cross and she has helped change the lives of hundreds.

Ruby has visited nurseries and Cub/Scout groups, helping children learn about animals and helping those who are frightened of dogs to overcome their fear. She also visits more than 80 residents at two different nursing homes every week.

Sometimes nursing homes can be lonely places. Ruby's visit gives people something to look forward to. Ruby

does not judge, she does not see age, gender, disability or colour. She is a friend to all. She is calm, loving and understanding.

Many residents have told me that Ruby is their best friend in the whole world, and for many, she is their only visitor. When we first arrive, the room is usually quiet; by the time our visit comes to an end, the room is busy with people reminiscing about their pets and laughing together.

I sent my application at midnight on my 18th birthday when I was finally old enough



to volunteer for Pets As Therapy, and after Ruby passed her assessment, we started visiting right away. It's one of the most rewarding things I've ever done. You get

to meet so many incredible people and make a difference to their lives. Ruby loves all the extra attention and treats!

Just two hours out of my week means so much to so many, and I can't think of a better way to spend my free time.

Ruby and I are raising money for Pets As Therapy by climbing Mount Snowdon; this is Ruby's first ever mountain climb. If you can, please donate at <https://www.justgiving.com/PATDogRuby> so that more people can benefit from the therapy dogs and cats provide. Thank you!



Lyndsey Uglow

I have four Golden Retriever therapy dogs. We visit Southampton hospital and also a few nursing homes.

Pets As Therapy handlers are only permitted to take one dog on each visit, so I tend to alternate them, although the most popular dog at the hospital is Leo. He has such a very special way with the children and won a volunteers award last year for his work there. We see about 100 children on the wards at the hospital every

week and many of them have their photo taken with him.

We visit all types of young patients with all sorts of injuries and illnesses. Some are only in for a short period of time and then there are those who are in for longer, including those in the Wessex Children's Cancer Unit. Sometimes we are also asked to visit patients in the intensive care unit, but each and every visit is different.

The crucial thing about visiting is giving people



time. It is a privilege to be able to volunteer as a Pets As Therapy handler and I would encourage anyone whose dog has a great temperament to consider joining us.

Ant Skordis



The reason why I first got Scarlett involved as a Pets As Therapy dog was to have a Rottweiler out there doing something positive for a change.

As much as she loves other dogs, Scarlett is definitely more of a people lover. She is so happy and content when we make visits to a local care home for people with mental health issues.

Scarlett is so happy being stroked and meeting new people anyway that I didn't think she was doing anything out of the ordinary. But when I had feedback from the care home, explaining that remembering Scarlett being there the week before, or even reacting to Scarlett's touch with a smile, were small breakthroughs for that person, it fills me with pride that she's doing something so rewarding.

Dogs & people

Mrs E Hodge



I have three Pets As Therapy dogs. Jack Russell Terrier Bodey loves visiting the elderly and has a special bond with Josey Flinn, an 83-year-old lady who has no mobility but can move two fingers. Bodey jumps on to her bed and snuggles in under her chin, which enables her to tickle him with her fingers. When she nominated him for Pets As Therapy Dog

of the Year last year, she said he brought joy and love into her otherwise miserable life.

My other two dogs, collie Jazz and Jack Russell Mr Bojangles, love working with children. They work with four- to seven-year-olds, helping them with their reading and confidence. Some of the children we work with have social and emotional problems. One little boy gets

some quite bad episodes, but as soon as Jazz enters the room, his reaction is immediate and he cuddles Jazz until the episode passes.

The rewards for me as a volunteer are immense, not only because I make new friends in the people I visit, but the best part is watching how the dogs can change someone's life by just being there.

George visits the Sella Ness Gas Plant each week for the oil workers who are away from home on long contracts and missing their dogs, and he also visits old people's homes and a hospital.

Gillian Ramsay

This is Gorgeous George, who is a Pets As Therapy dog along with his mum, Freja.

His first love is children, and he works every week in a primary school as part of the Read2Dogs scheme, which we piloted here in Shetland. He is the UK's most northerly Pets As Therapy dog and has a varied career. He has helped a young girl with cerebral palsy to walk, he visits the Sella Ness Gas Plant each week for the oil workers who are away from home on long contracts and missing their dogs, and he also visits residential homes and a hospital.

George spends the rest of his week in my shop and my



dog training club, where he is loved by all as a big teddy bear and a bit of an agility numpty!

Sandra Heathcote

Balto is a two-year-old Siberian Husky. He was a stray and was due to be put to sleep. When I first adopted him, I had Kira, a 14-year-old husky, who was also a Pets As Therapy dog and so I knew what qualities are required. Balto has a calm, gentle, loving nature, making him a natural for the role, and he has been qualified for a year.

I am a retired police officer, so able to spend more time on visits. We visit mainly psychiatric wards and two nursing homes. His visits are keenly awaited and we both get so much back. I have met some amazing people, both patients and staff, and Balto loves the fussing and copious treats.

He often has his photo taken. Just the other week, we lost a young friend. We attended the funeral, where, when explaining to a relative who Balto was, the man said he knew and then produced his phone, showing me a photo of Balto that our friend had sent to him. This meant a lot to me.



Last week we sat with another friend, who had taken an overdose, while transport was arranged to A&E. Balto seemed to know and was more attentive than usual. Later, the friend contacted me to say Balto had kept her calm and helped her through the incident.

I have a photo of a painting of Balto done by the friend who overdosed. It took her many hours of work. I cherish it, as it shows how special he is to people.



Liz Worrall

Crumble is an Italian Spinone, a breed renowned for its calm temperament and friendly ways.

I get so much joy from Crumble and therefore thought I'd share her with the community. She visits a

care home where she truly has all four paws under the table. All the residents absolutely adore her, as do the staff. She is starting work in a primary school soon, helping children read, and in two weeks' time is off to Bristol Royal Infirmary to visit the cardiac and

dementia wards.

I highly recommend being a Pets As Therapy volunteer. Everyone benefits: the animal for being loved, the recipient for therapy, and the volunteer for meeting and making some wonderful friends.

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Lab test

An exciting new DNA test can reveal a Labrador's predisposition to hip dysplasia long before X-rays can be used



If you have a Labrador Retriever puppy and have done your homework, you probably know the breed has a high predisposition to hip dysplasia. But did you know there's now a DNA test that could help you tackle the issue from the start?

Hip dysplasia is something many dog owners – especially owners of large dogs – know all too well. It's an inheritable disease in which the hips develop abnormally during growth, so that the head of the femur doesn't fit correctly in the hip socket. This results in a loose socket, friction, pain and potentially serious damage, such as secondary osteoarthritis.

Hip dysplasia (HD) can begin to develop in five-month-old pups, worsening with time, or might not show up until

the dog's adult years. While environmental considerations play a part, HD is heavily influenced by genetic factors. Now a DNA test is available to assess the genetic predisposition of Labrador Retrievers – one of the breeds with the highest incidence of HD.

The Dysgen test was developed in 2011 by researchers at Bioiberica, the University of Barcelona and Progenica Inc.

Alfonso Velasco, Bioiberica veterinary director, says, "Just from a simple blood or saliva sample, Dysgen can determine the genetic profile of a Labrador Retriever and classify it in a risk group according to the genetic markers found: minimal, low, moderate and high."

In order to develop this DNA test, hip radiographs and

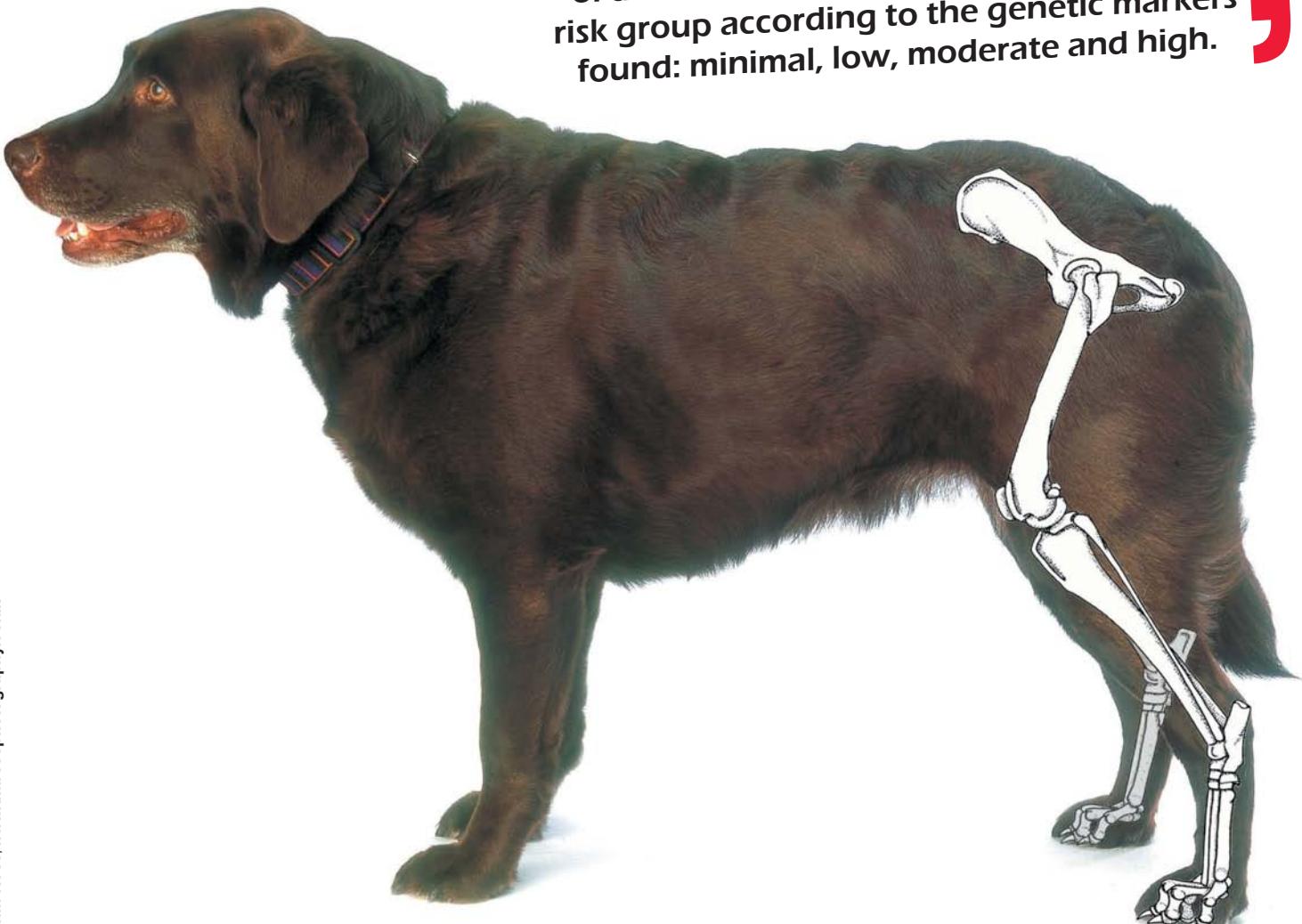


blood samples were obtained from Labrador Retrievers with either healthy hips or severely affected hips.

"Comparing what we saw on the radiographs (phenotype)

with the information from the blood samples (genotype), a complex mathematical model was developed," Alfonso says. "This model was validated in an external population and

Just from a simple blood or saliva sample, Dysgen can determine the genetic profile of a Labrador Retriever and classify it in a risk group according to the genetic markers found: minimal, low, moderate and high.





it shows an accuracy of 85 per cent, which is very high, especially in a polygenic disease where it is necessary to assess seven different genetic markers."

As it can be performed during the first few weeks of a dog's life, the Dysgen test can assess the genetic predisposition to developing the disease before the appearance of radiographic signs of osteoarthritis and/or hip dysplasia. With such information available when the dog is still young, not only can breeders decide which dogs are best for breeding and which are not, but preventive steps can be taken to slow down the disease and control its course.

"This information will allow for individualised treatment depending on the risk level of each dog, and specific medical and surgical decisions for each animal can be made with greater certainty," Alfonso says. "Customising healthcare and developing products and diagnostic tests tailored to the individual patient is certainly a

very interesting approach that might provide more efficient management strategies. In the particular case of canine hip dysplasia, it has been suggested that a shift towards genomic screening (as opposed to the traditional approach based on the radiographic diagnosis) may contribute to eradicating the disease in the future. Early detection diagnostic tools like Dysgen are definitely examples of this advanced concept."

Currently the test is only available for Labrador Retrievers, but it will also be available for Golden Retrievers in the near future. ●

Find out more at:
www.bioiberica.com/animal-health/companion-animals-1/joint-health/dysgen-test-1/

Hipster Harness

Exercise is among the non-surgical solutions of hip dysplasia, where the pelvic muscles are strengthened to keep the femur's head inside the socket. In order to obtain this, physiotherapy and hydrotherapy are needed – but would recovery be quicker if dogs could continue rehabilitation at home as well?

Israeli industrial designer Galia Weiss thinks so, and has worked with a vet to design a full-body harness for that purpose.

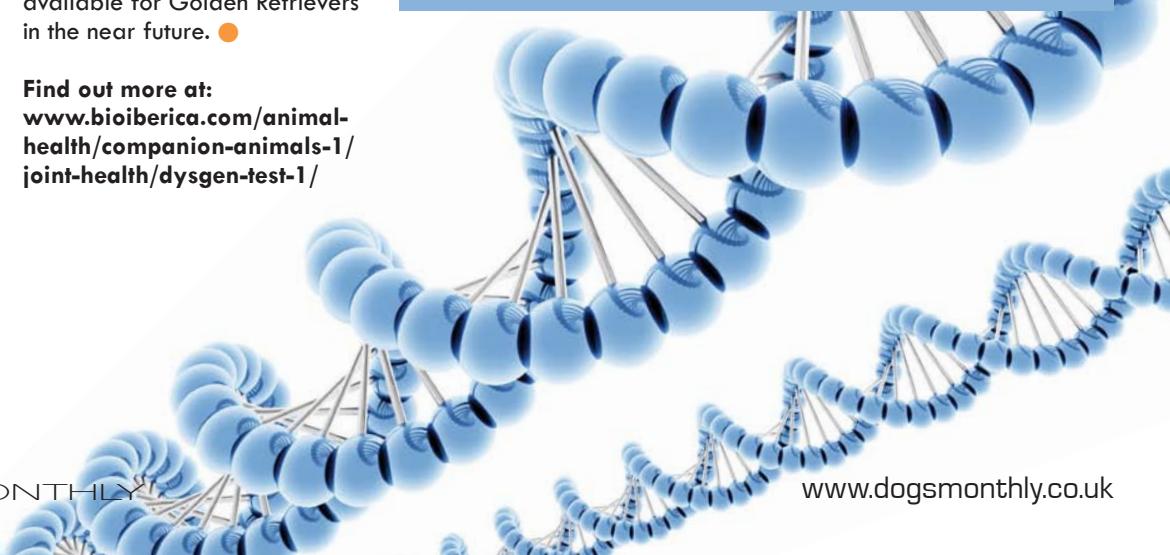
Hipster Harness, as it's been dubbed, fits around the dog's chest and stomach to wrap like a cast around both hind legs – supporting the dog's rear end and providing resistance for the rear legs to work against.

Galia says the harness was

a project for her senior year at university.

"It had to have something to do with animals, so I talked to several vets about issues that may be helped with a harness. That's when one of them, who specialised in rehabilitation, told me about hip dysplasia," she says. "She told me what muscles needed strengthening in order to keep the femur's head in the socket. I brought in my knowledge as an industrial designer to come up with a harness that could help."

Galia is currently starting to create working models and hopes she'll soon be able to test the harness on dogs with hip dysplasia. Here's hoping that it will work just as well in practice as it does in theory.





Happy and healthy dogs with 8in1

Tasty, twisted treats for great chewing fun and healthy teeth

Have you ever been amazed at the way your dog wolfs down his food without, it seems, even chewing it? It's true that dogs only chew when they really need to, but how does this eating habit affect the health of his teeth? And how can you make sure he's eating the right chewy treats to help keep them in tip-top condition? **Dr Claudia Westfahl, Vet and Companion Animal Specialist**, explains.

"Out in the wild, wolves have to really 'work on' their food by tearing strips from their prey and chewing them into small pieces. This task is made simpler or even unnecessary for modern-day dogs as a result of ready portioned dog food. When dogs finish eating in next to no time they can

become bored or overweight and the teeth-cleaning effect of chewing is almost completely lost.

"When dogs eat this way, they cannot satisfy their natural chewing instinct or their need to work on their food and may end up chomping on substitutes such as furniture or shoes – much to their owners' distress!"

So how do dogs clean their teeth?

"Dogs clean their teeth on the one hand by producing saliva, which contains germ-reducing substances and washes away bacteria, and on the other, by mechanically rubbing them against chewy materials, much like the way we brush our teeth.

"Plaque is caused by food

debris and bacteria, which mineralise into tartar under the influence of food materials. While plaque can be removed by chewing or brushing a dog's teeth, tartar has to be scraped off by a vet."

How can plaque and tartar be prevented?

"Regular chewing can effectively clean the teeth by rubbing plaque off them before it mineralises into tartar. In the wild, animals clean their teeth as they eat."

Chomping on healthy treats such as 8in1 Delights helps to clean dogs' teeth and effectively strengthens their gums, also satisfying their natural chewing instinct.

8in1 Delights Twisted Sticks

Delights Twisted Sticks combine a patented, mouth-watering mixture of chicken wrapped in thin rawhide, which encourages your dog to chew through to the very last piece, maximising the health and dental benefits of rawhide products and meaning less mess for you, too!

These specialist treats are developed by vets and loved by pets. Not only are they healthy and low in fat, but they are also extremely tasty – so much so, independent research has shown that 9 out of 10 dogs prefer 8in1* Delights.

8in1 Delights Twisted Sticks are ideal for smaller dogs and are available in Chicken, Pork and Dental varieties, ensuring every pooch is catered for. Pick up a pack from any good pet retailer from £2.75 (10pc) and £8 (35pc).

*2010 SAW preference test

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TUFFIES



iFetch fun & games



I just wanted to send our hugest thanks for the iFetch, our prize in May's short story competition. The house rule is that any parcels that arrive for Pelucchi or Mosca, they get to open! Mosca had great fun with the box; she loves parcels, as they usually contain her food toys. Pelucchi instantly found the 'ballies', which I did expect!

We took the iFetch out into the garden for the first time yesterday and had great fun. Poor Pelucchi is mesmerised by the noise it makes. He sits, listens, and then suddenly realises there's a ball involved and dashes off to fetch it. Mosca, with her keen eyesight, has worked out the noise change that signals the ball's about

to be released, and is already prepared for the mad dash down the garden.

They haven't worked out how to use it themselves yet, but I'm sure we'll get there and it's just a matter of time now that they know what it's all about!

Thank you again for picking Pelucchi's story.
Zoe, Pelucchi and Mosca Le Carpenter, via email



Editor's note:
Fancy winning an iFetch too? See page 45 for details of how to enter our 'Next Big Thing' competition. We also have fantastic prizes to give away every month in the HiLife Best Friends Trophy (p50), Pin-up Pups (p60) and right here in Mailbox, so get writing!

Our pick of the **Dogs Monthly** postbag. Write to: **Dogs Monthly**, The Old Print House, 62 High St, Chobham, Surrey GU24 8AA or email gill.s@dogsmonthly.co.uk

Sky high

I thought you might like to see this picture of Sky, my 11-year-old Shetland Sheepdog, sitting in a tree!

Sky loves going for walks in our nearby woods where there are lots of fallen trees that she loves to climb. It's become a regular habit of hers now and she'll just sit there until you take her photo. I think she loves the vantage point it gives her, but she also loves all the attention. I normally have to climb up and get her down, or she'd stay up there all day!

She also likes to sit on park benches, or on the back of couches and chairs, and after a cuddle she loves to just lie across my shoulders and fall asleep.

I've had Sky since she was a puppy. She can be a really cheeky character and really enjoys posing for photos – as you can see!

Lea Richardson, via email



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Alfie's ears could
have guided aircraft
– they were like radar!

All about Alfie...

Dogs Monthly's writing competition aims to find 'the next big thing' in pet publishing. This month **Jane Neill** tells a story of love, loss and hope for the future



Lola has Alfie's spirit.

The following chain of events put my daughter in a dark place.

It started when Samantha was eight years old. A smart, sensible girl, she was popular with classmates, apart from one boy. Samantha was bullied by him for her remaining time at junior school.

When clumps of Samantha's hair fell out in my hands, I took her to see a psychologist. By this time she was suffering from acute anxiety. The meeting with the psychologist didn't seem to make a lot of difference and the bullying continued.

What helped enormously, 18 months later, was the arrival of Alfie – a wire-haired Dachshund crossed with a Chinese Crested. We already had a four-year-old Whippet who was a gentle soul, but Alfie was Samantha's dog. He chose her.

The cliché – small dog, big personality – was certainly true in Alfie's case, and what a unique-looking dog he was too. As a puppy, Alfie's ears dangled like a Dachshund's. Gradually, they reached for the stars. Alfie's ears could have guided aircraft – they were like radar! This little dog gave Samantha back her confidence.

GREAT COMFORT

Just before the start of year nine my father, Samantha's beloved grandad, was taken ill. He was a father figure to Samantha, as her father had left when she was seven months old. Dad was in hospital for six months and this had a huge impact on Samantha. Much of my time was spent visiting my father on the ward and on many occasions Samantha returned home after school to an empty house. I later learned

that Samantha would talk to Alfie and sought comfort in him. They were inseparable.

The following summer we were supposed to move house, but the sale fell through. It was to be another three months until we finally moved. During this time Samantha missed seeing her grandad. Before his illness he used to visit us every week but was now confined to a wheelchair. This, combined with spending the whole of the summer holiday in limbo because of the house situation, put a strain on everyone.

What happened next was to put Samantha back in a bad place. Two weeks before she was to due to start the first year of her GCSEs, we lost Alfie.

Within just 36 hours, four-year-old Alfie lost all use of his body from the neck down.

There was nothing that could be done. It was heart-breaking. Tears rolled down our faces as we said our goodbyes. Alfie still managed to lick the tears from our faces, and I shall never forget the intense eye contact between him and Samantha.

PEACEFUL

The vet came to our home and Alfie was put to sleep in a dignified and peaceful manner, surrounded by his family.

This event pushed Samantha into a very dark corner. Acute anxiety returned, followed by severe panic attacks. She was unable to cope with school.

However, two months after losing Alfie, Samantha chose Lola – a little black Jackahuahua. She looks nothing like Alfie, but she has his spirit. Lola is helping Samantha along the road to recovery. ●



Samantha and Lola.

OVER TO YOU!

Write about how your pet changed your life and you could win an iFetch!



Our panel will be picking one of your stories each month to retell in the magazine, and this month's winner will get an iFetch to keep their pet amused as they muse on what to write next!

To enter, write – in a nutshell – the story about how a current or past pet changed your life. It is a challenge to keep it to 500 words, but they do say all good film plots can be summarised in eight words!

The story is king here, not your writing ability. If you are the next JK Rowling – fantastic; but if you need help and your story shows merit, a journalist will interview you to polish up your story. We have a team of experts who will take a rough diamond and make it sparkle.

ENTER NOW! Send your 500-word true story by email to nextbigthing@dogsmonthly.co.uk quoting **True Story** in the subject line. Or you can send by post to **Dogs Monthly, Pet Subjects Ltd, The Old Print House, 62 High Street, Chobham, Surrey GU24 8AA.**

Please include a daytime phone number, your address and any photos you may have to illustrate your story.

By entering the competition, you are giving us permission to publish your story in a subsequent edition of the magazine and the online editions. We may feature some runners-up in the magazine as well as the winner if the standard is very high.



Write in and win an iFetch...

Jane wins an iFetch – an innovative toy that lets your dog play fetch without needing an obliging human! Visit www.goifetch.co.uk for more information.

Training & behaviour

Dobermann, posed by a model



Gently does it

Visiting a couple and their dog in order to give a character assessment for a foster agency threw up an unexpected training issue for behaviourist **Yvonne Collins**

Dear Yvonne

We have had our five-year-old rescue Dobermann, Milo, for the past four years. Milo is a gentle giant in every way, but we are looking to provide foster care for children, and the foster agency have quite rightly asked that we seek a behaviourist to assess his temperament prior to placing children in our home. They are concerned with three things, mainly: he is very big; he is a Dobermann; and we haven't had him since he was a puppy.

Could you visit us and assess Milo in our home with a view to providing a report for the agency, please?

Michael and Jennifer James,

Providing a temperament assessment report is a huge responsibility. I can only assess what I see and, as we all know, dogs may react differently depending on the situation and may be more emotionally aroused with some people than with others. I decided the best way to view this important and responsible task would be to carry out an emotional, mood and reinforcement assessment – 'Emra' – as devised by Coape (www.coape.org).

I arrived at Milo's house and was greeted by the biggest

Dobermann I have ever seen. He didn't bark when I knocked, and as the door was opened, he was sitting quietly beside Jennifer, who invited me in and asked if it was OK for Milo to say hello to me.

"Of course," I replied, and she quietly said, "Good boy, go say hello" to the giant beside her.

Milo stood up and approached me calmly and quietly, allowing me to fully appreciate his size.

Once we were in the living room, Michael explained that they had acquired Milo from ➤





I always think of a 'springer' as a term used to describe a spike or pinch collar, but didn't imagine for one second that this lovely couple, who adored this gentle giant, would use such a device

a Dobermann rescue charity when he was a year old. He had been put up for rehoming because he had outgrown his previous owners' flat. It had been a difficult decision for the former owners to make because Milo was a perfect gentleman around their young children, who were extremely distressed at saying goodbye to their playmate. Michael and Jennifer had regularly attended a dog training school and Michael was keen to show me how gentle Milo was with the cat, how polite he was around food, and how nicely he played with and offered up his favourite toy.

"The only problem we have with him is that he pulls on the lead," said Michael, "and with his size, it is a problem for Jennifer to walk him. If only he could be as calm out and about as he is in the house and garden!"

"We have tried everything," continued Jennifer. "The collar we are using now is by far the best. Our trainer recommended it and we are thrilled with it, but I still think I would struggle walking him if I have a young child or buggy with me."

"Yes, the collar is brilliant," continued Michael. "I'm sure you've heard of it – it's called a 'springer' and it really does stop him from pulling. We didn't want to resort to a choke chain, as we have heard about the damage they can do."

I always think of a 'springer' as a term used to describe a spike or pinch collar, but didn't imagine for one second that this lovely couple, who adored this gentle giant, would use such a device, so I asked if I could see the collar.

When Michael returned with a spike collar and went to put it on Milo to demonstrate its effectiveness, I couldn't hide my horror. Sensing this, he stopped and Jennifer said, "It's not cruel at all. The trainer uses them all the time and the dogs really respond well. We'd never use anything that would hurt him!"

There was a flicker of relief on their faces as I heard myself saying, "No, I wouldn't describe it as cruel," which was replaced by dismay as, without thought, I continued, "I'd say it's barbaric!"

I couldn't blame Jennifer and Michael. They had been convinced by someone they considered to be a professional that this torturous device was not in any way cruel or punishing to their beloved dog. Wanting to convince them that I was not judging them, despite my initial reaction, and needing to dispel the information they had been given by their trainer, I explained the basic theory of operant conditioning.

HOW WE LEARN

Learning is determined by consequences. If a behaviour is rewarded, it is likely to be repeated; if it is punished, it is less likely to be repeated. There are four quadrants to operant conditioning: two that increase or improve desirable behaviour (positive reinforcement and negative reinforcement) and two that reduce undesirable behaviour (positive punishment and negative punishment). We define positive as adding something as a consequence of a behaviour, and negative

as removing (or avoiding) something as a consequence.

The previous trainer had convinced Michael and Jennifer that the spike collar was working within the quadrant of negative reinforcement, as loose lead walking would improve as Milo learned to avoid the "mild discomfort" inflicted by the spike collar. While this is a common argument, I would consider the use of anything that causes pain or discomfort to be positive punishment. Before the dog can learn to avoid the discomfort, his pulling must first be punished by the pain inflicted by the collar.

I explained that a device such as a spike collar or choke chain could not be considered to be fair, as it is difficult for the dog to predict when the pain will be inflicted. On occasion, it is likely that the lead will become tight as the dog greets a person or another dog, or when the owner steps away or, as we often see, the owner tightens the lead to steer the dog around an obstacle. This can have huge implications on the dog's perception of anything he may associate with the pain caused by a tight lead, as he may believe that it is the close proximity of a person, dog or other thing that caused the pain. He may take action to keep the 'thing' at a safe distance in an attempt to avoid the pain.

Having explained the pitfalls of using the prong collar, I suggested using a Gentle Leader headcollar. Emotionally torn between the best thing for Milo, but needing to walk him comfortably with the children,

Michael and Jennifer were keen to see what this particular type of collar had to offer.

The Gentle Leader is fully adjustable to ensure a snug fit around the dog's neck. The nose loop has an adjustable sliding clamp that maintains the perfect fit. When a dog pulls, gentle pressure is applied around the dog's muzzle by the nose loop. This pressure is transferred to the back of the neck, stimulating a relaxation response, as endorphins are released through pressure point contacts on the bridge of the nose and the back of the neck – this same relaxation response is seen when a mother carries her puppy by the scruff. So, where the now relaxed dog's head goes, the rest of his body follows.

GENTLE GIANT

I fitted a Gentle Leader on Milo and we set off for a walk around the block. He walked beautifully!

By way of my original assessment, Milo was truly a lovely dog. In terms of Emra, his hedonic needs were being met by his loving owners, and his mood state was ideal, so there was no real emotional reactivity. His only problem was his pulling on the lead, which we were able to address in the one session.

The foster agency passed Jennifer and Michael and they have had a variety of foster placements. The children love Milo and he loves them. He does the school runs on his Gentle Leader and the Jameses use a second lead so that the children feel they are able to walk him to and from school. ●

About the author



Yvonne Collins completed her Coape Diploma in 1999 and qualified as a Coape Association Behaviour Practitioner in 2005. Yvonne worked for two local authorities as a dog warden and enforcement manager for more than 20 years, as well as running dog training and rehabilitation classes in her spare time and regularly seeing behaviour cases. She now runs a small but busy boarding kennels with her husband where the mood and emotional state of the dogs in their care are of paramount importance.

Yvonne is currently the chair of the Coape Association of Pet Behaviourists and Trainers (CAPBT) and the Association of Pet Dog Trainers (membership number 253). She currently has two rescue collies, two miniature Shetland ponies and nine chickens.



C A P B T

For your nearest behaviour practitioner www.capbt.co.uk
For your nearest APDT-UK trainer www.apdt.co.uk



Dogs & people

Best friends



F Every day Milo gives me confidence that I'm not on my own. If I black out, just his presence when I come round is a huge comfort and makes the experience so much easier to deal with **J**



“Milo’s my shadow”

Meet Denise Price and Milo, our next contenders for the **HiLife Trophy 2015**

The minute seven-week-old Milo looked at me, I knew he was going to be my very best friend. He's like my shadow; I turn around and he's there. Even when I'm in the bath he's there! He's such a happy, energetic, loving, enthusiastic, cheeky Sprocker Spaniel, and I couldn't live without him.

Milo has done so much for me and improved my quality of life no end. It's only in the last 18 months that I've felt confident enough to start living

my life the way I want to, and for that I thank Milo every day.

From the age of 15 I've had a condition called non-epileptic attack disorder, where I black out randomly with no warning. Going out by myself, or even being in the house alone, is dangerous and I can't do a lot of the normal things a 27-year-old would do. I had to be tutored at home, had little confidence around people and tried to avoid social interactions as much as possible.

ENTER MILO...

We'd heard about epilepsy alert dogs, but as I don't have epilepsy, I wouldn't have qualified. And although there's some early-stage research into using dogs for people with my condition, it's a long way from allocating or even training dogs. So that's where Milo comes in...

Choosing Milo was the best decision I ever made. At our very first meeting, he licked my face and I knew he was the one for me. Ever since we've

had an unbreakable bond. He knows when I'm sad or when I'm poorly – and when I'm happy, he wags his tail like crazy! He never leaves my side; he's there for every tear, every bump and every scrape.

Just a week after Milo came to live with us, I took him for a wee in the back garden and then blacked out. He stayed by my side the whole time, licking my face and trying to wake me until my family came to my aid. He just seemed to know I needed him.

Every day Milo gives me confidence that I'm not on my own. If I black out, just his presence when I come round is a huge comfort and makes the experience so much easier to deal with. I'm training him to lie down next to me when I black out, and I'm also teaching him to come out with me during the day. My hope for the future is to have him certified as a support dog. Without him, I'd be lost.

PRIZES & PROGRESS

Never in a million years did I ever think I'd feel comfortable enough to enter a class at a dog show. Eighteen months ago, having to stand there and speak to the judges would have sent my social anxiety through the roof. But the first summer I had Milo we did a local dog show. I was incredibly nervous, but with Milo looking up at me, I had the confidence to go and stand in the line-up for 'cutest puppy over six months' (the whole time thinking, 'let's just get through this...'). To my amazement we came fifth and got a rosette! The place didn't matter – it could have been 50th for all I cared – it was the pride I felt that mattered. Pride in Milo, and pride that with him by my side, I'd had the confidence to do it.

When Milo was 12 months old, we all went on holiday. He was fantastic the whole time – looking to me for commands and so willing to learn. I'd put an 'I'm in training' collar on



him, and even when people stopped to ask me what Milo was in training for, I didn't shy away. I explained to people about my condition and was so surprised by the response. Most people had never heard about it and all the compliments about Milo's good behaviour filled me with pride – and he got lots of treats and fuss!

With Milo by my side, I'm making so much progress in overcoming both my anxiety and my embarrassment about my condition. In the past, even writing this piece would have made me nervous and I probably wouldn't have dared send it in. I owe every step of my journey to Milo and even though I still black out, I know I can overcome any obstacle with him beside me. He truly is the most amazing thing that's happened to me. ☺

How to enter

Send your story (up to 1,000 words), plus a selection of good-quality pictures, to 'Best Friends' at the address on page 4, or email bestfriends@dogsmonthly.co.uk putting 'HiLife Best Friends' in the subject line. Please provide a daytime phone number, and your full name and address.

- Emailed pictures should be attached as jpeg (minimum 300dpi resolution).
- If you post photos (prints only, not photocopies), please enclose a SAE if you would like them returned.
- Nominations will be accepted until 30 November 2015.

Rules of entry

- From the entries received, 12 will be chosen. Contenders will be featured in each issue from March 2015 to February 2016.
- The overall winner receives the HiLife Trophy and can choose from the range of HiLife dog food to the prize value of £300. They can make their choice of dog food from the HiLife website, or speak to a HiLife manager about the various options.
- Employees of Pet Subjects Ltd and Town & Country Petfoods Ltd are not eligible for entry.

Tell us how much your four-legged friend means to you and you could win the HiLife Trophy 2015

The 2015 HiLife 'Best Friends' Trophy is now underway and we want to hear from you!

Perhaps your dog has helped you in some way – encouraging you to make new friends, take up new hobbies, or even inspiring you to a new career. Perhaps he has helped you through difficult times, or just been there when you've needed him.

Tell us about the things you do together – walking, playing, competing, working or helping others – and about the companionship you give each other.

Now in its fifth year, the HiLife Trophy, sponsored by Town & Country Petfoods Ltd, will be awarded to the partnership featured in our 2015 'Best Friends' series that receives the most votes from readers.

Overall winner

At the end of the series, Dogs Monthly readers will be able to vote for the partnership they think most deserves the HiLife Trophy. Voting will commence following the publication of the last featured entry in the February 2016 issue.

The winning owner will receive not only the magnificent HiLife Trophy, engraved with their names, but also a six-month supply of the HiLife dog food of their choice (up to a value of £300).

If your story is picked – and don't forget you can nominate others as well as put yourself forward – then we'll be in touch.

So what are you waiting for? Send in your entries now and share your story!

Pets win prizes!

Each month, the dogs featured in 'Best Friends' will receive four 1.5kg bags of HiLife Feed Me! Complete Mince.

This range is nutritionally balanced and contains all the goodness of dry foods, but is softer, meatier and tastier. Its popular varieties contain high-quality meat ingredients and no artificial colours or flavours.



About HiLife

The HiLife brand of high-quality dog foods is owned by family-run Town & Country Petfoods Ltd, based in Leicestershire. To discover more about the nutritious range of HiLife dog food, visit www.hilife.co.uk

Staying together

If there's one antidote to loneliness, it's the constant companionship of a devoted furry friend. We look at the schemes available that cater for older people and their pets

Older people are especially vulnerable to feeling isolated and alone. According to the NHS, 51 per cent of all people over the age of 75 in England live alone. Loneliness has been the biggest single recurring problem in all 275,000 phone calls received last year by The Silver Line, a helpline providing information, friendship and advice to older people. Pets are wonderful companions and

keep loneliness at bay – but what is an ageing pet owner to do when their health declines and independence is lost?

According to a recent survey, more than two million people in Britain know an elderly person who had to have their pet put to sleep because they were moving into a residential care home. Of the people interviewed, 18.5 per cent said they knew an elderly person who had to rehome their cat or dog. ▶







Margaret would be lost without Henry; he is her rock and the one constant in her life. Henry helps her to maintain relationships in the community, as everyone knows him

2012, when she was diagnosed with early-stage dementia and didn't want to be separated from her beloved dog.

Margaret's niece, Jane, says, "Margaret would be lost without Henry; he is her rock and the one constant in her life. Henry helps her to maintain relationships in the community, as everyone knows him. He may be a little spoilt, but he is a real people's dog, and he loves Margaret as much as she loves him. Margaret is the fittest we have seen her for a long time and we are so grateful to our carers, Anne and Olga, for enabling her to stay at home and be with Henry."

The importance of pets for the well-being of elderly owners is the focus of the Cinnamon Trust, a national charity established in 1985 by Averil Jarvis and named after her own beloved Corgi. The charity's primary goal is to relieve "the anxieties, problems, and sometimes injustices faced by elderly and terminally ill people and their pets, thereby saving a great deal of human sadness and animal suffering."

PETS IN RESIDENCE

Averil says, "The survey's findings are simply heart-breaking, especially since there are so many alternatives to putting down your pet, even if you need to go to a residential home. Many don't accept pets, that is true, and they should be encouraged to change that policy – but there are also many residential homes that do allow their residents to take their pets with them."

A Pet Friendly Care Homes Register, put together by the Cinnamon Trust and available on request, lists all types of care homes across the UK that will allow residents to take their pets with them – each of them visited and assessed by the Cinnamon Trust.

"There are 500 listed in the current edition, but those are the top ones – there are actually many more," Averil says. "We're ready to put people in contact with any of them."

If the pet owner doesn't wish to leave their home for whatever reason, Cinnamon Trust volunteers are willing to provide practical help with

Dominique Kent, director of operations for the Good Care Group, says, "With such a high number of residential homes refusing to allow pets, many elderly people are faced with a heart-breaking choice. As a result, there are often cases where people in need of help refuse to seek it out of fear of having to make that choice, thus making their situation worse."

The Good Care Group is a professional provider of home-

care services that enable older people to remain at home, allowing them to retain some independence and, of course, to stay with their pets for as long as possible.

PETS AT HOME

"There are many reasons why older people may prefer to receive care in their own homes, and we have found that staying with their pets is often one of the main reasons," says

Dominique. "About 32 per cent of the people we look after have pets – mostly dogs and cats, but some have birds as well, and one of them even has a donkey! We help look after them as part of our care service. Being close to their pets has an incredibly positive effect on older people's health and morale."

The Good Care Group has looked after Margaret and her Golden Retriever, Henry, since

taking care of their pets – for example, by walking the pet of a housebound owner, or taking them to the vet if needed.

Volunteer Sandra Gregory provides help to a housebound elderly lady and her Yorkshire Terrier, Mitzi.

"When I first went to meet her and Mitzi, she wasn't very keen on the idea at first," Sandra says. "She seemed very reluctant, and I found out why when she asked me how much it was going to cost! I reassured her that it was a volunteer job, entirely for free, and she agreed. Now I take Mitzi out for a walk four days a week, and she loves her walks."

The Cinnamon Trust also takes care of pets whose owners have passed away, or who'd rather see their pet off to a good home before they do. In many cases, pets are placed with other older people who contacted Cinnamon Trust after their own pets died – thus giving a pet a new home and elderly folk some company.

"Arrangements can be made with us from early on," Averil says. "The pets in our care are

either given new homes or taken to our sanctuaries, where they'll be loved and looked after. Either way, their owners will continue to receive information about them."

PLANNING AHEAD

To ensure older pet owners' peace of mind, both Dogs Trust and the RSPCA offer the option to register animals with them, in order to grant the pets continued care should the owner pass away.

Dogs Trust Canine Care Card scheme is a free service, where, following a simple registration process, owners are issued with a special card to carry with them, as they would a donor card, ensuring that Dogs Trust will take care of their pet and look for a new home if anything happens to the owner.

The RSPCA offers a similar service called Home for Life. Both charities recommend owners inform their families of any wishes regarding their pets, and mention it in their will.

Older people with the opposite problem – they would love a pet, but cannot

afford the resulting fees – may be interested in Give a Dog a Bone, a charity set up in November 2013.

"The aim of the charity is to tackle loneliness in old age, and the rising number of animals in shelter, by bringing the two groups together," says founder Louise Russell. "The charity has become a 'go to' place for people suffering from terminal illness, or for people who have already passed, to help find a new home for the beloved pets."

"But our main objective is providing financial support to those aged 60-plus who wish to adopt a rescue animal, by paying the associated rehoming fee and, if needed, help on a monthly basis by covering other costs, such as pet food."

The Cinnamon Trust's Averil Jarvis says, "There is no reason at all why an older person would have to put down their pet. There are so many alternatives available; it's only a matter of getting the word out there. No one should have to be lonely, and no one should have to be alone."

LEADS TO FOLLOW...

- **The Good Care Group** www.thegoodcaregroup.com
- **The Cinnamon Trust** www.cinnamon.org.uk
- **RSPCA's Home for Life** www.homeforlife.org.uk
- **Dogs Trust's Canine Care Card** www.dogstrust.org.uk/get-involved/wills-legacies/canine-care-card
- **Give a Dog a Bone** www.giveadogabone.net

Pet Friendly Care Homes

Star Rated!



2013
4th EDITION

If the pet owner doesn't wish to leave their home for whatever reason, Cinnamon Trust volunteers are willing to provide practical help with taking care of their pets



The miracle of birth

Considering whether to breed a litter from a much-loved pet requires a huge amount of thought, research, knowledge and planning. In the third part of our series, trainer and behaviourist **Sue Williams** prepares for the puppies' arrival...



A dog's pregnancy lasts approximately 63 days, but it's not unusual for the puppies to arrive a few days earlier or later. With this in mind, it's essential that the breeder has the time to monitor the soon-to-be mum even more closely and has everything ready. In my opinion, breeders have a duty to do everything they possibly can to ensure the health and happiness of the bitch. Such care and attention to detail is an investment and will go a long way to maximising the chances of not only the whelping going smoothly, but also the subsequent rearing of the puppies.

For the first few weeks Celyn will tend to all her puppies' needs.

During the last few weeks of her pregnancy, Celyn blossomed and my excitement was building as I looked forward to the puppies' arrival. I acclimatised Celyn to the whelping box and the puppy room to make sure she felt relaxed and comfortable and therefore felt it was a safe place for her to nest and have the puppies. As the birth drew closer, her behaviour changed and she spent a lot of time resting. While she chilled, stretched out, I placed my hands carefully on her belly and felt the puppies moving around – a special moment and such a privilege!

Suckling the first puppy triggers the release of hormones that initiate the birth of the next.



Celyn was supervised at all times during the final week – usually by me, as I was going to be her birthing partner.

I firmly believe a breeder needs to be there with the bitch while she whelps. This doesn't mean interfering unnecessarily, but by being present you can monitor her condition and ensure things are progressing as they should. If things were to go wrong, it's essential to act quickly, as the life of the bitch and/or the puppies could be in danger.

The bond and relationship the breeder has with their bitch should be strong so the breeder can offer positive reassurance, which will help the dog during the whelping. This is even more important with first-time mums like Celyn, as they can become anxious and unsure about what to do.

Celyn was supervised at all times during the final week – usually by me, as I was going to be her birthing partner. If I was otherwise engaged, someone took my place, but I was never far away and could return quickly if Celyn went into labour. By this time she was sleeping overnight in my bedroom, so I would be aware if the puppies decided to arrive during the night – which invariably they do!

STAGES OF WHELPING

There are three recognised stages to whelping. Stage one, the onset of contractions, causes the cervix to open. This stage can last up to 24 hours or

sometimes even longer. Stage two, the passage of the puppy or puppies, is marked by strong contractions. And stage three where the placental tissue or afterbirth is dispelled.

The onset of stage one was marked by changes in Celyn's behaviour:

- She became extremely restless
- She stopped eating, and refused food
- She shredded the bedding and paper in the whelping box to make a nest
- She spent long periods lying down panting with a glazed look in her eye.

This started about 10am and she became more and more restless in the following hours. During this time she was in her whelping box and was very clingy, constantly seeking comfort and reassurance from me. Offering Celyn lots of paper not only allowed her to exercise her urge to shred, but it's also easy to dispose of during the whelping process when it gets wet and messy from the amniotic fluid.

Some nine hours later, I noticed Celyn became quieter, which coincided with the contractions getting stronger and closer together. I could see her concentrate and really push. At the same time I could see the bag appear at her vulva and, shortly afterwards, following some massive contractions, the first puppy was born. Celyn was a little confused initially, so I showed her what to do by breaking

Health & welfare

the sac to reveal the pup. I also broke the umbilical cord and stimulated the puppy by rubbing it with a towel. This proved how vital it was for me to have been present; if I hadn't intervened, the puppy would almost certainly not have survived, as Celyn made no attempt to release it from the sac. Quickly, however, her maternal instinct started to kick in and she was soon licking the puppy.

A newborn pup's instinct is to gravitate towards its mother and suckle. It is amazing to watch them crawl along to locate the nipple. Born deaf and blind, they use a combination of instinct and scent, and once they've arrived at the milk bar, they are soon content, suckling and getting essential colostrum – the mother's first milk, which is rich in nutrients and antibodies.

It is important to encourage a puppy to suckle from their mum as soon as possible. Often, new mums are a bit unsure about this at first, and Celyn was no exception, but with lots of quiet encouragement, she soon allowed the pup to suckle. This is not only important for the puppy, but it also triggers the release of hormones that initiate the birth of the next pup.

KEEPING CLEAR RECORDS

Shortly after the birth, I was able to weigh and examine each puppy to record basic information and check there were no deformities. Each puppy has its own record sheet where I write:

- Time of birth
- Sex
- Identifying mark
- Weight
- Any other information, such as problems during whelping.

About an hour after the arrival of the first puppy, I noticed the contractions starting again and Celyn began looking agitated – a sure sign another puppy was on its way. During the arrival of the other pups, it's important to take care that those already born don't get accidentally trodden on or squashed. The design of the whelping box I used for Celyn meant I could safely position pups under the heat lamp,



The two boys.

keeping them safe, warm and preventing them from getting wet again with the subsequent births. As soon as the next pup was safely delivered, all the pups could then be placed with mum.

Celyn gave birth to five puppies; unfortunately, one was born dead and I was unable to revive it, but the other four pups were delivered safely:

- Puppy 1 – a chocolate roan boy
- Puppy 2 – a blue roan girl
- Puppy 3 – a black girl
- Puppy 4 – a black boy.

The whole whelping process lasted until the following day with the final pup being born at 5am. It's always difficult to judge whether a bitch has had all her pups, so I like to have my vet perform an ultrasound scan. It also allowed the vet to examine Celyn and the pups to check they were all OK. Finally, after an exhausting 36 hours, with Celyn and her four puppies happy and relaxed in the puppy room, I got some sleep!

THE FIRST WEEKS

If everything goes to plan, the bitch will tend to all her puppies' needs for the first few weeks, until weaning. She will provide all their nutritional requirements, stimulate them to go to the toilet and clean up after them. During this time she will be reluctant to leave them, even to relieve herself. It's important to make her feel safe and avoid anything she might find stressful. Remember, it is a

The two newborn girls.



bitch's natural instinct to take herself off on her own to have her pups and keep them hidden until they are several weeks old. Feeding puppies puts a tremendous demand on her, so it's vital to look after her really well, ensure she has constant access to fresh water, and lots of excellent-quality food.

Although deaf and blind, young puppies do respond to scent and touch, and, as a trainer and behaviourist, I understand the importance of early learning and socialisation. I believe puppies

benefit tremendously from human interaction from birth, so I spent time lots of time sitting with Celyn in the whelping box, gently handling and stroking the puppies. I also weighed the pups twice a day to check they were growing correctly.

I felt both privileged and honoured that Celyn had allowed me to share this special time and experience it alongside her. ☺

Next month:
The puppies grow up and meet their new families.

About the author



Sue Williams BSc is the chairwoman of the Guild of Dog Trainers and a member of the Canine and Feline Behaviour Association, and specialises in dog training and behaviour modification. Sue is passionate about teaching using methods based on understanding and communication. She runs The Canine Centre in North Wales.

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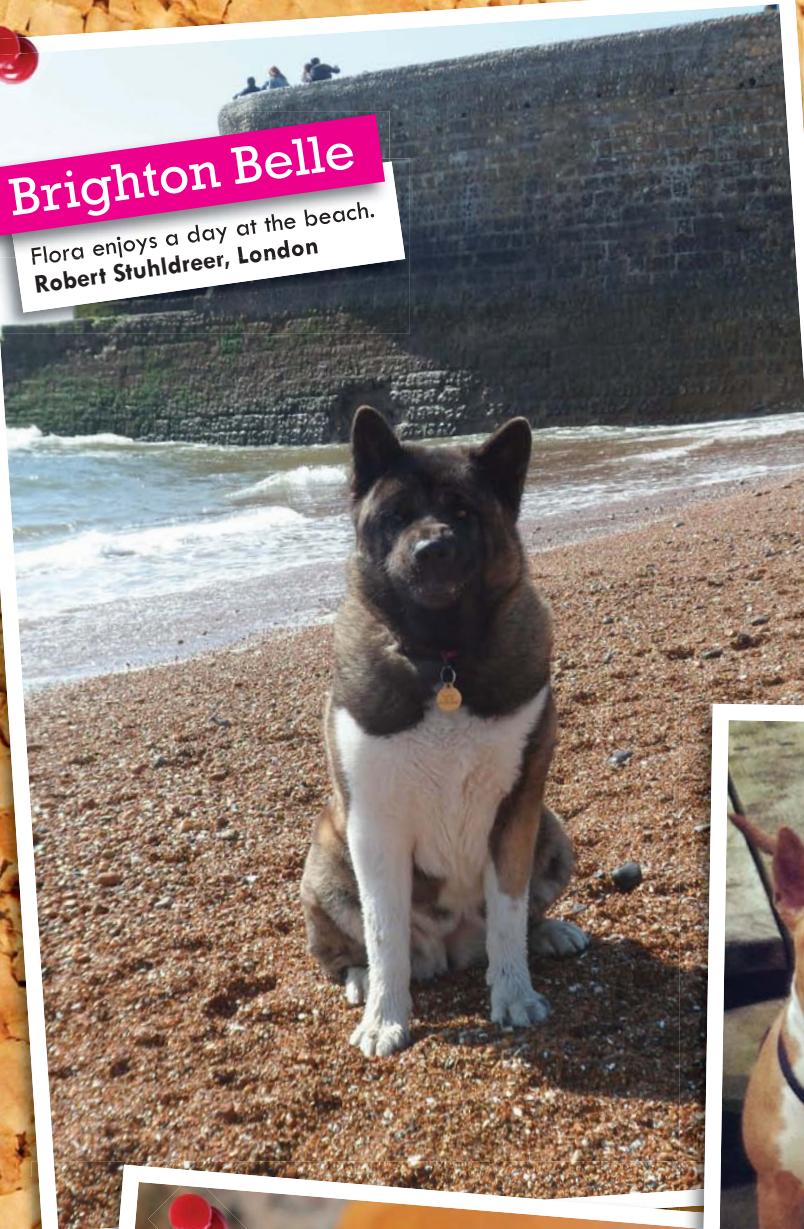
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"Boing!"
Kruger perfects his
kangaroo impression.
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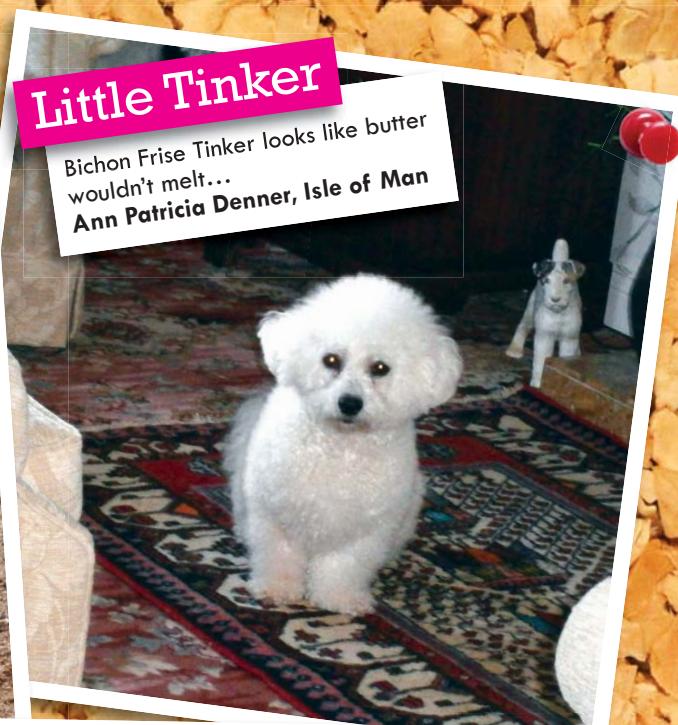
Brighton Belle

Flora enjoys a day at the beach.
Robert Stuhldreer, London



Little Tinker

Bichon Frise Tinker looks like butter wouldn't melt...
Ann Patricia Denner, Isle of Man



Spot on

"Time for walkies? Follow the wellies!" say Toro and Pacha.
Kirsty Smith, South Wales



Sizing up a Shih Tzu

Ten-week-old Toby has his weekly weigh-in.
Christina Savage, Lancashire



Lap dog

Chino loves to give his family licks and kisses.
Geoff Shaw, Hampshire



Play by the rules

Dogs and puppies love to play. But, asks **Sue Gilmore**, how do you ensure they keep their sharp little teeth to themselves, and games remain on your terms, not theirs?

Puppies don't bite, they just nip because they're being playful!" Really? In my experience puppies do bite and it can be very painful indeed. Their tiny, needle-sharp

teeth easily pierce skin and draw blood. Nipping really needs nipping in the bud!

Puppies are undeniably cute. Their doleful expressions and adorable innocence can melt even the hardest heart, despite

the pain! Allowing a puppy to mouth and chew fingers is often excused, simply because "they're only babies" and we know it's not intentional, but it can become a habit.

Puppies use their teeth to eat

their food, of course, and also to nip littermates while learning bite inhibition during play fighting. Bite too hard and the puppy takes the consequences in the form of a harder bite back from his sibling, or simply



Belgian Shepherd Dog puppy. Photo posed by models



the game stops. It's a natural instinct for puppies to want to play-fight their littermates, so biting is used as a weapon, but it's important for puppies to learn how and when to use their teeth and to understand what the consequences of their actions can be.

Over-aggressive play often results in a change in pack order, the winner moves up the hierarchy and the loser moves down. It also results in some puppies avoiding the aggressive puppy altogether, just like children might avoid the school bully. ➤

It's essential you discourage the puppy from the onset otherwise the biting only gets more intense and more painful

Top tip

If puppy play-biting is never allowed to develop, it is unlikely to become a problem later on.



Holly, a Tibetan Terrier puppy, by Tim Rose (www.timrosephotography.co.uk). Photo posed by models

I often see dogs playing with their owner, interacting in a playful manner, and then deciding to keep possession of the toy by dancing around with the tuggy in their mouth, just out of the owner's reach. When teaching the rules of the game, clip a lead on him to ensure he can't run away with the toy.

Sometimes these types of interactive games can over-stimulate a dog to the point that he growls and becomes aggressive. Remember that a growl is very often the precursor to a bite. Some breeds are more prone to aggression when playing than others – terriers and guarding breeds, for example. Terriers shake toys to replicate killing prey, so while this is completely natural behaviour and perfectly harmless in most circumstances, the dog needs to be monitored, especially where children are present in the home.

Nipping and biting can also be attention-seeking behaviour. Simply walk away and ignore the dog – do not reward his nipping by giving him attention, even if it is negative attention from telling him off.

The most positive way to stop a puppy or adult dog from nipping or biting is to obedience train him. It's stimulating, interactive and highly rewarding from both the owner's perspective and the dog's. Start training the moment the puppy or dog arrives in your home. Use simple commands so he understands what you require. Be consistent and assertive. Firm but fair.

Owning a puppy or adult dog should be a richly rewarding experience, fun and above all a great opportunity to bond with your faithful friend – just set out the ground rules and stick to them and you'll have a happy, contented companion for life. ●

TESTING TIMES

When puppies leave the litter, we humans replace their littermates to an extent and the pups bring with them their experience and learned behaviours, sometimes not to our advantage. They test us out with nibbling, mouthing, nipping and biting. The reaction they get from their owners indicates whether or not to continue to do this. Without training, these actions will certainly get worse, harder and more painful.

Play is often initiated by the puppy. He nips his owner to get attention, and even though he might be pushed away, he misinterprets this as joining in the game. The same actions are involved in rough play, which signals to the puppy that snapping, growling and biting are acceptable and all part of the game. It's essential you discourage the puppy from the onset, otherwise the biting only gets more intense and more painful.

Two puppies playing together often become boisterous to the point where one puppy will bite the neck of the other. If the reaction of the victim is to retaliate then either a scrap will

ensue or the severity of the bite will bring the game to an end.

Human reactions are much slower than dogs' and puppies' and, as a result, we're at a disadvantage if we encourage them to engage in rough play. They only learn bite inhibition through practice and by judging our reaction, so if we continue to engage in such sparring, the puppy will think that it's OK to continue with his aggressive behaviour. Ignore it at your peril – it will not get better, only worse and more painful as the puppy matures.

When a puppy bites a hand, he gets a reaction. Usually the person pulls their hand away quickly and perhaps lets out a cry in pain. Children are likely to react in a very animated fashion, which can encourage the dog to bite again.

Imagine a puppy tugging on your trouser leg... you pull back and a tug of war ensues. The puppy growls and thinks it's fun. You try to stop the puppy ruining your trousers, but the more you try to stop him, the more he tugs and the greater his enjoyment. As he grows and matures into an adult, the tugging gets stronger, the

growls turn into aggression, and what started as an amusing game has become a test of strength. The owner shouts at the dog to stop and the anger may well increase, until finally the dog is put out of the room. Put a child or elderly person in this situation and you can immediately see the dangers.

Shutting the dog out of the room is an option, but he may become frustrated, hyperactive and more enthusiastic than ever during playtime. It is far better to put rules in place, stick to them, and deal with unwanted behaviour as soon as it occurs.

TUG OF WAR

Many owners like to buy toys for their pets and tuggy ropes are popular interactive toys. They encourage the dog to get excited, gently growl and develop his play drive. Depending on the dog, this can be an advantage or a disadvantage!

Teach your dog to release the toy on command. I use the word "give" and offer my open hand for the dog to place the toy into it. When he does this, I praise him and the game restarts until I decide playtime's over.

About the author



Sue Gilmore
MA BSc (Hons) is the political adviser to the Pet Education, Training and Behaviour

Council (PETbc), and is a professional dog trainer, behaviourist and dog photographer. She runs the Essex Dog Academy and Gilmores Dog Photography.

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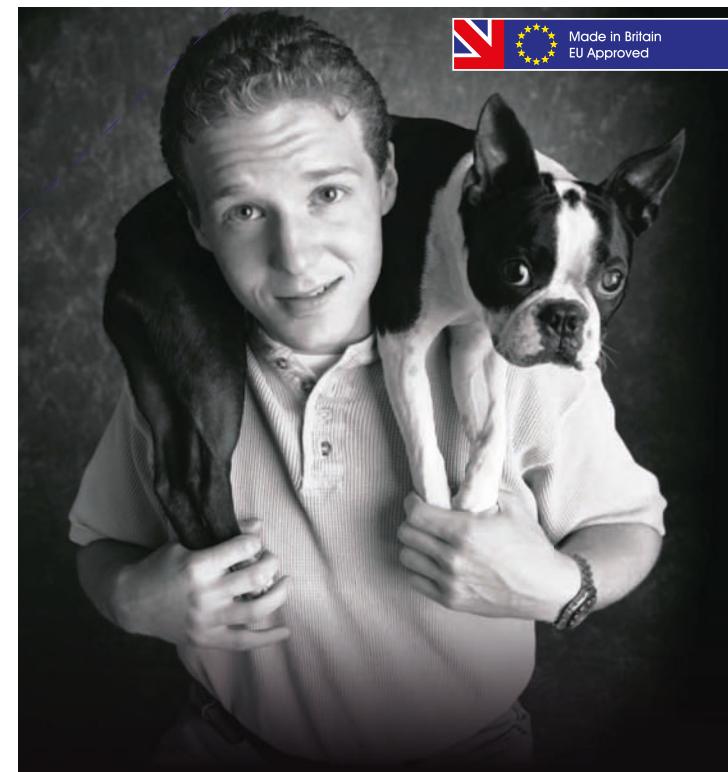


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Homoeopathic medicine – whether for people or animals – frequently inspires passion and debate. **Chris Deadman**, of the Good Vet Guide, looks at both sides of the argument

Homoeopathy: the great debate



Nothing polarises opinion quite like a discussion on homoeopathic medicine. Depending on which side of the divide you sit, it's either a proven form of holistic medicine used successfully by 200 million people worldwide, or a potentially dangerous pseudo-science that relies on the credulity of its patients to warrant its effectiveness.

Homoeopathy is growing in popularity. The British Association of Homeopathic Veterinary

Surgeons (BAHVS) alone has more than 140 members. Pet owners and horse owners are increasingly inclined to try so-called 'alternative' treatments in cases where conventional veterinary medicine has failed to address the problem.

Many of these owners can attest to the efficacy of homoeopathy in the treatment of their own medical conditions, so why shouldn't it be equally effective for their companion animals?

WHAT IS HOMOEOPATHY?

First, a quick history lesson. Although homoeopathic treatments can trace their roots back to the ancient Greeks, it was a German doctor, Samuel Hahnemann, who first coined the phrase in 1796. Homoeopathy works on the principle of 'like cures like' – in other words, a substance taken in small amounts will cure the same symptoms it causes if

taken in large amounts.

A second central principle is based around a process of dilution and shaking, called succussion. Practitioners believe that the more a substance is diluted in this way, the greater its power to treat symptoms. Many homoeopathic remedies consist of substances that have been diluted many times in water until there is none or almost none of the original substance left.

The case against: Joe Inglis

Well, that's the theory, but does it work? Not according to ITV's resident vet on *This Morning*, Joe Inglis, who says, "However persuasive the anecdotal evidence may be, there is no scientific basis for any of the claims made by homoeopaths. Veterinary science has to be based on verifiable data and it is a fact that there are no recognised studies supporting the effectiveness of homoeopathy. Don't get me wrong, I'm happy to change my mind, but only in light of credible objective evidence.

"Take, for example, the use of homoeopathic 'nosodes' in place of traditional vaccinations. Nosodes are homoeopathic preparations made from bodily tissues and fluids taken from patients suffering from a disease. There are many alarmist websites that make



unsubstantiated claims about the danger of vaccines, and promote these nosodes as a safe and effective alternative.

"This is a very dangerous practice in my view, as there is absolutely no evidence that nosodes produce any

protective effect whatsoever, and by encouraging people to avoid vaccinations, the promoters of these alternatives are endangering the health of not just the individual animals that are not vaccinated as a result, but whole populations

– vaccinations are only truly effective at wiping out diseases if sufficient animals are protected.

"As seen by the rise in cases of measles in children as a result of the MMR scare, it only takes a small drop in the number of vaccinations to allow a disease to take advantage of the chinks in the protection and cause infections."

"Advocates of homoeopathic nosodes make very confused claims about how they work and why they are safe – apparently they work in a similar way to traditional vaccines, by stimulating the immune system to react against the virus that causes the disease, but manage to do so without any risks of side effects because they are so diluted as to contain no actual particles of the disease at all. It is bad science and there is no place for nosodes in the prevention of serious disease, either in animals or people."

The case for: Tim Couzens

Understandably, this is not a view shared by holistic vet Tim Couzens of The Holistic Veterinary Medicine Centre, a specialist referral practice for complementary veterinary medicine.

Says Tim, "I have been practising complementary medicine for over 20 years and I can point to several studies demonstrating the effectiveness of micro-dilutions. But, more than that, there are innumerable examples in my own career and those of others where homoeopathic treatments

have delivered the kind of positive results that mainstream veterinary medicine failed to do. If these treatments did not work, I would not practise holistic medicine, but the plain fact is: these treatments can be very effective."

According to Tim, an initial homoeopathic consultation differs greatly from a conventional veterinary visit. The vet will look not only at the patient's symptoms from a conventional viewpoint, but also delve into the animal's character, the way in which

environmental conditions affect the symptoms and emotions, as well as looking at how past illness and nutritional factors can impact on health. By doing this, the holistic vet can aim to find the remedy or remedies that most closely match the patient and their symptoms from the several thousand options they have at their disposal from the animal, vegetable and mineral kingdoms.

Homoeopathy is often used in conjunction with other therapies, such as acupuncture, nutritional supplements and herbal medicine, to treat all manner of conditions from chronic skin conditions to providing support



to dogs undergoing treatment for cancer. Homoeopathic medicines do not interfere with the body's function, or have a direct pharmacological effect. The body's reaction to the medicine is what brings about the curative process.

Health & welfare

CLAIMS & COUNTERCLAIMS

Joe Inglis says, "Homoeopaths may claim their treatments have no side effects but this isn't possible; you can't claim something has a positive effect without acknowledging the possibility of a contrary reaction. It's just basic science."

Leaving aside arguments about the existence of scientific evidence, there is an enormous body of anecdotal evidence that shows homoeopathy is very effective at treating all manner of canine illnesses and conditions, both acute and chronic. And because animals are unaware of the so-called 'placebo effect', the improvements observed by the owner are real and verifiable, goes the argument.

According to Joe Inglis, however, that might not be the case.

"Pavlov discovered the phenomenon of 'conditioning' in animals, and conditioning is considered to be a major part of the placebo response. So depending on the circumstances, animals do, in reality, respond to placebo.

"At veterinary college, we were taught that a third of dogs will get better anyway, a third will stay the same, and a third will get worse. It's very likely that any improvements seen in a dog's condition as a result of homoeopathic treatment would have occurred anyway. The effect is psychological and operates upon the owner. Because they expect the treatment to work, they see improvement where there is nothing, or nothing more than normal time-limited or cyclical changes in the condition.

"This effect is greatly enhanced when the owner is highly motivated to see improvement, either because they have a strong personal belief in the treatment, or have invested time, money and credibility in it. It will also reassure the 'worried well' owner whose dog is not actually ill in the first place."

Responds Tim Couzens, "Sceptics of homoeopathy assume that homoeopaths, more than any other type of health practitioner, have the ability to

elicit a placebo effect. We all acknowledge a certain power of the placebo in treating the 'worried well', but do sceptics of homoeopathy really believe a placebo effect in treating all of the conditions commonly presented to homoeopaths?

"Members of the BHVA are also members of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons and have a background in conventional veterinary medicine. I challenge any sceptic of homoeopathy to try to maintain a first-opinion practice and dispense only 'sugar pills', rather than real homoeopathic medicines.

"My challenge is simple: while seeing a wide variety of animals with various acute and chronic problems, take them off all their conventional drugs (with the exception of those of medical necessity), and prescribe only sugar pills for just one week. When you consider that homoeopathic vets do this for 52 weeks of the year, sceptics of homoeopathy should not have any problem if they think homoeopaths are only prescribing placebos to

their animal patients. It won't be long before they are besieged by complaints from their patients' owners. Critics routinely overstate the placebo effect."

NO FENCE SITTING

As you can see, there is scant middle ground in the homoeopathy debate – you either believe in it, or you don't. Homoeopaths do not claim to understand precisely how their treatment works, only that it does. For them, the countless instances of animals being cured by homoeopathic treatments is more than enough evidence of its effectiveness. To those who follow the path of conventional scientific methods, this apparent lack of empiricism is enough for them to reject homoeopathy entirely.

In the final analysis, you pay your money and you take your chance. ●

Where do you stand on the homoeopathy debate?

Have homoeopathic remedies helped your pet where conventional medicine has failed, or do you reject anything that's not based on proven science? Email gill.s@dogsmonthly.co.uk or write to *Dogs Monthly* at the address on page 4.

About the author



Chris Deadman has helped make the Good Vet Guide www.goodvetsguide.co.uk the number-one independent

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It's a very relaxed place to visit with lots of opportunities to sit down and have a coffee if the shopping and spectating take their toll!

You'll definitely need a sit-down after the fun-packed day of doggie dancing, show-jumping rabbits and duck-herding dogs, and hundreds of animals to meet and greet. There will also be fun and informative talks and

demonstrations from leading pet experts, interactive features and amazing animal action displays.

With 25,000 visitors expected, the London Pet Show is the perfect opportunity for animal lovers of all ages to learn about different types of pets, get the latest advice and do some excellent shopping.

Amongst all the fun, at the heart of the show are messages of responsible pet ownership and animal welfare. And best of all, *Dogs Monthly* readers get 20 per cent discount on tickets if you quote DOGSM20 when you book!

If you can't make it, there's DogFest (14 & 21 June 2015) and the National Pet Show at the Birmingham NEC (7-8 November 2015) to look forward to – so circle those dates in your diary now!

More information at: www.dog-fest.co.uk and www.thenationalpetshow.com

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Meet animal experts and celebrities, including reptile expert Crocodile Joe and Channel 4's Supervet Noel Fitzpatrick, who will present his wonderful Supervet Live show in the Super Theatre, revealing the latest advances in the veterinary profession and recounting heartwarming success stories. After each show, Noel will be available for signings, photo opportunities and to answer any questions.

Head to the Nerf Dog Activity Ring to watch amazing agility, training and obedience displays, as well as dog dancing, duck herding by expert trainer Richard Curtis, and heats of the legendary Scruffts competition.

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for 2015, where even the most disobedient dog can become head pupil! With an entertaining and educational programme, you can learn all about how to train your dog and find the right diet to support a healthy and happy lifestyle. From learning some of the basic commands to seeing some of the most entertaining dogs perform, Hill's School for Dogs is one feature not to be missed.

Take a seat at the Zoflora Super Theatre, which will once again play host to an action-packed programme of events, including the exciting SuperDogs Live competition and Supervet Live with Channel 4's Noel Fitzpatrick, as well as displays from incredible animals, from parrots to performing dogs.

Don't miss the bouncing bunnies, with the show-jumping rabbits. As one of the most popular attractions at the London Pet Show, this feature is exclusive to the show and can't be seen at any other event in the UK.

There's the Governing Council of the Cat Fancy (GCCF) Top Cats competition, an exciting cat show open to members of the public. Both pedigree and household cats will be able to enter this brand new feature, competing for certificates and rosettes in categories including Best of Colour, Best in Show, Friendliest Cat, Most Handsome Male, and, as the finale, Best Household Pet.

If you have a passion for the weird and wonderful, head to the Exo Terra Reptile and Fluval Aquatics experience. The Reptile Area will showcase a plethora of reptiles, bugs, spiders and many exotic creatures, including tree lizards, water dragons, giant turtles and a range of chameleons as well as bearded dragons, spiny-tailed lizards, a chuckwalla lizard and leopard geckos, while the Aquatics Area will feature beautiful fish and aquatic set-ups, with a wide array of colourful and eye-catching fish housed in beautiful aquarium surroundings.

Meet some pony friends at the Pony Club Stables and watch demonstrations on tacking up, grooming and different riding styles throughout the show weekend. Riders can also learn how to use the equipment and tools involved in caring for their steeds as well as mounting, dismounting and maintaining balance on the Pony Club's special mechanical horse.

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Our experts in this issue



Tim Couzens
BVetMed, MRCVS, VetMFHom, Cert Vet AC
runs a referral centre for complementary veterinary medicine near Lewes in East Sussex, offering homeopathy, acupuncture, herbal medicine and other therapies.



Nick Jones MA is a member of the Canine and Feline Behaviour Association. A canine behaviour specialist, Nick takes pride in resolving issues that owners are experiencing with their dogs. These can range from puppy visits to cases of aggression.



Graham Finch
BVSc, CerIVD, MRCVS treats all kinds of ailments in dogs, cats and other family pets. He has a particular interest in patients with skin diseases. He is currently owned by a chocolate Labrador, a Cocker Spaniel and a "very scruffy" Border Terrier, plus two cats.



James Farrell
BVetMed, CertSAS, MRCVS has been a qualified vet for 13 years and has worked for the PDSA, as well as in private practice. He now owns a veterinary practice in South Yorkshire, where he treats dogs, cats and other small animals.



Mark Effenberg is chief executive of Healthy Pets Insurance which he founded in 1996. Mark owns eight chickens, a one-eyed Golden Retriever and a black Labrador. Healthy Pets is an online leader in pet insurance at www.healthy-pets.co.uk



Sue Gilmore
MA BSc (Hons) is the political adviser to the Pet Education, Training and Behaviour Council (PETbc), and is a professional dog trainer, behaviourist and dog photographer. She runs the Essex Dog Academy and Gilmore's Dog Photography.



Kirsten Dillon
A.DIP CBM is a qualified trainer and behaviourist at KD Canine Specialist. She lives in Surrey with her husband, children and two dogs: Mable, a Mastiff cross, and Louis, a French Bulldog.



Sue Williams BSc is chairwoman of the Guild of Dog Trainers and a member of the Canine and Feline Behaviour Association. She specialises in dog training and behaviour modification and is passionate about teaching, using methods based on understanding and communication. She runs The Canine Centre.



Paul Manktelow
BVMS MSc GP Cert DMS MRCVS regularly appears on our TV screens as a leading vet. Paul is also principal veterinary surgeon at the UK's largest veterinary charity PDSA and is the founder of the pet health website vitalpethealth.co.uk



Libby Sheridan
MVb MRCVS graduated from Dublin Vet School and worked in a small animal practice before joining the pet food industry. She then set up her own business offering specialist business and communication support to the pet care industry.

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Golden Retriever, posed by a model

“She doesn’t drink enough”

Q My dog doesn’t seem to drink very much water. She’s four years old now and I’ve had her since a pup, but she’s never been interested in drinking. A friend has said that she’s likely to get bladder stones and kidney problems – is this true?

Paul Manktelow advises...

A It’s certainly true that drinking plenty of water and keeping well hydrated has health benefits. The kidneys and urinary system certainly benefit from adequate water intake and most dogs will regulate intake themselves naturally. There is also water in food, so just because she isn’t drinking large amounts doesn’t necessarily mean she isn’t getting enough.

A good way to establish hydration levels is for your vet to do a blood and urine test. The percentage of red blood cells in the sample indicates whether the blood is hydrated. The concentration of urine can also help to determine kidney function and hydration, so that’s quite a useful indicator too. You can also do physical tests, such as measuring skin tenting (pinching the scruff) and assessing the gums and how quickly colour returns to them when you press on them (capillary refill time).

If the test results are normal, I wouldn’t be concerned, as she is obviously regulating her water levels well. However, if you still want to urge her to drink more, you can try to encourage her by making the water more palatable. A popular trick is to put some of the juices from her food into her water bowl daily, which often makes the water smell delicious – to dogs, that is!



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Injured tail

Q I have an Irish Wolfhound who cut her tail. It scabbed over, but when she wags it, she makes it bleed again. The vet has recommended amputating the tip, but we really don't want to do that, as we think it just needs time to heal. If the tip is amputated, maybe the new tip won't heal either! She is three years old and has had no health problems before this incident.



James Farrell advises...

A Without actually seeing the damage for myself it's hard to give a proper second opinion, but there are a few general things to consider with this type of injury.

Dogs with long 'whippy' tails can be particularly prone to this sort of incident, and yes, once damage has occurred, healing can be slow and full of setbacks due to the ease with which the original injury can be knocked. Long term, ongoing damage can mean the skin becomes too scarred to heal properly or well, so

sometimes the best option is to remove the scarred part and start again with fresh, healthy skin that stands a better chance of healing fully.

There are a few ways to protect an injury on the tail tip, whether the original damaged area or the operation site after amputation. Some vets use a large plastic syringe case with the base cut off (there are also custom-made tail-tip protectors), and when this is threaded on to the tail and fastened, it provides protection around the wound while leaving it open to the air.

For especially happy dogs,

determined to wag, the tail can also be hobbled to a hind leg, preventing excessive swinging. This is not painful, but dogs will only tolerate it for a certain period of time and often wag it loose, or free it from its mooring by chewing through the dressing material! If you are determined not to lose the tail tip, then this is an option you can try, but if the tissue is already excessively scarred, it may not work very well.

Talk to your vet about your concerns. I am sure they can reassure you that they are only planning to remove the minimum amount

of tail to resolve the problem fully. Sometimes, however, a significant portion of tail does need to be removed to get back to healthy skin with a good blood supply so that the surgical wound heals well. Otherwise, you might end up with a similar problem and have to start all over again.

If you do reach the point where your Wolfhound's tail is fully healed and she hurts it again, then the 'syringe case and hobbling' method might well allow it to heal immediately, rather than having a repeat of the problems you've been experiencing.



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Golden Retriever, posed by a model

Summer itching

Q My dog suffers from allergies during the spring and summer. My friend says you can use antihistamines to control the itching – does this work?

Graham Finch advises...

A I'm sorry to hear about your itchy friend. Antihistamines are sometimes prescribed; however, they rarely work as a sole therapeutic agent by themselves, but may be of benefit if used together with other anti-inflammatories, soothing shampoos and so on.

Research into antihistamines suggests they are effective in around one in five dogs with allergies and some antihistamines work better

than others. This is dependent on the individual though, and often involves trials of three to four different types of antihistamine to see if one makes a difference. If the skin is inflamed or infected, however, they won't work.

So overall, I tend not to use antihistamines very much and, if I do, I usually use them in conjunction with other medications. It would be best to have a chat with your vet and see what they recommend.



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Cloudy eyes

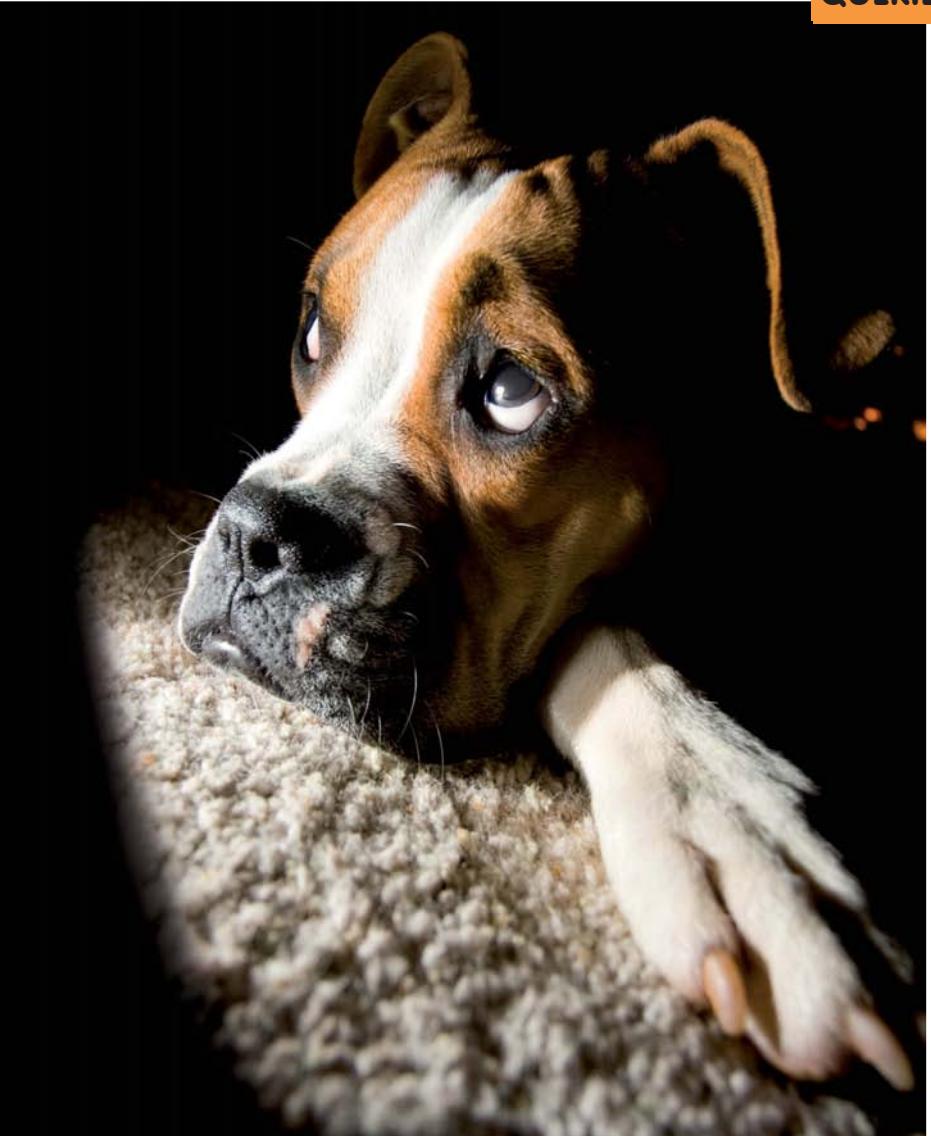
Q My 13-year-old Boxer has recently started getting a lot of discharge from his eyes and the front part of his eye looks cloudy. Is this just old age, or something I should be concerned about?

Graham Finch advises...

A This is something that should definitely be checked out. While cloudiness can sometimes occur as part of the ageing process, there are other, treatable conditions that can produce very similar signs.

From your description I think the main one I'd be thinking about would be 'dry eye' where the tear gland stops producing adequate tears and the front part of the eye dries out. We test for this by putting a small strip of special filter-paper against the surface of the eye and measure the flow of tears up the strip. This is usually a non-painful procedure, which is tolerated well by the patient and only takes a couple of minutes for each eye.

If it turns out that your Boxer does have dry eye, this can be treated with false tear preparations and an ointment to reduce the inflammation around the tear glands. It's definitely worth booking him in for a check-up with your vet.



Boxer, posed by a model

"He bolts his food"

Q My Labrador eats so fast that he finishes his meal in seconds, but half an hour later he throws it all back up again, undigested. I've tried holding him back to slow him down, but that just seems to make him worse. Have you any advice?

James Farrell advises...

A Mealtime anxiety is quite a common problem, but it can have several causes. The trick is to take any stress out of feeding time, and holding your dog back will just increase his worry. A dog that bolts his food could get a life-threatening condition called bloat, so he does need to be slowed down.

Make sure you are feeding the correct amount of food for his size, so you know he is getting enough but not too much. Then split the meal into two feeding times, so he doesn't overload his stomach. Other slowing techniques include increasing the size of the kibble you are feeding, so your dog has to chew. There

are also various moulded bowls available, with bumps that the dog has to eat around. The same result can be achieved by placing a large rock in the middle of a large bowl, but make sure the rock is so big that it cannot be eaten by mistake! You could also feed one of your dog's meals via a food-dispensing toy that he has to work to get the food from. This would also help to keep him entertained.

Try not to hover around your dog at mealtimes if he's anxious, but keep an eye on him while he gets used to these new feeding methods. If the vomiting doesn't stop once the bolting has, then take him to your vet to rule out any other cause.



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Underactive thyroid

Q My eight-year-old Beagle has been recently diagnosed with an underactive thyroid gland and has been started on once-daily tablets. Will she need these tablets for the rest of her life? If so, will it be possible to lower the dose once she has been on them for a while?

Graham Finch advises...

A Well, the good news is that the vast majority of dogs with an underactive thyroid respond very well to medication and regain their joie de vivre, usually within a few weeks of starting medication.

Hypothyroidism occurs as a result of an abnormality of the immune system that results in destruction of the gland

itself. So yes, your dog will need to be on medication for life. What vets usually do a few weeks after starting medication is to take a blood sample – ideally, just before you would normally give the tablet, so I usually advise morning administration. The blood test will measure the lowest level of thyroid hormone in the circulation. As long as this comes up into the normal range, we are good to continue at that dose.

There does appear to be an individual response to thyroid supplementation, so there is quite a wide range of dosage. Depending on your dog, you may find you can decrease the amount over time, but equally you may find the dose needs increasing, so blood sampling is needed periodically.



Beagle. Photo posed by models

Help for Horner's syndrome

Q I would like to know if alternative medicine might help my eight-year-old Golden Retriever, George. He was in really good health until he suddenly developed a problem with his face. My vet has diagnosed Horner's syndrome and tells me that there is no treatment.

Is this true and can you tell me more about the condition?

Tim Couzens advises...

A Horner's syndrome is classed as a neurological condition and affects the nerves going to one side of the face and the eye on the same side. It is seen in humans and a range of domestic animals, including dogs. Horner's syndrome causes a very specific set of symptoms that are usually fairly easy to spot. These include constriction of the pupil (called miosis), protrusion of the third eyelid part way across the eye, sinking of the eyeball back into the socket (due to loss of muscle tone) and drooping of the lower eyelid (called ptosis).

There are a number of underlying causes for this surprisingly common condition. The most usual is simply termed 'idiopathic', meaning there is no specific underlying reason. This form is particularly common in Golden Retrievers and the good news is that most (but not all) cases will resolve on their own within a few months.

Horner's syndrome can also arise due to injuries to the neck region, from other conditions that affect the neck (such as some types of cancer or intervertebral disc prolapse) and some diseases affecting the ear. Luckily, it's fairly unlikely that these are implicated in George's case.

There is certainly alternative support available and in particular I would investigate acupuncture and look into using the homoeopathic remedy *causticum* to speed up the recovery time.



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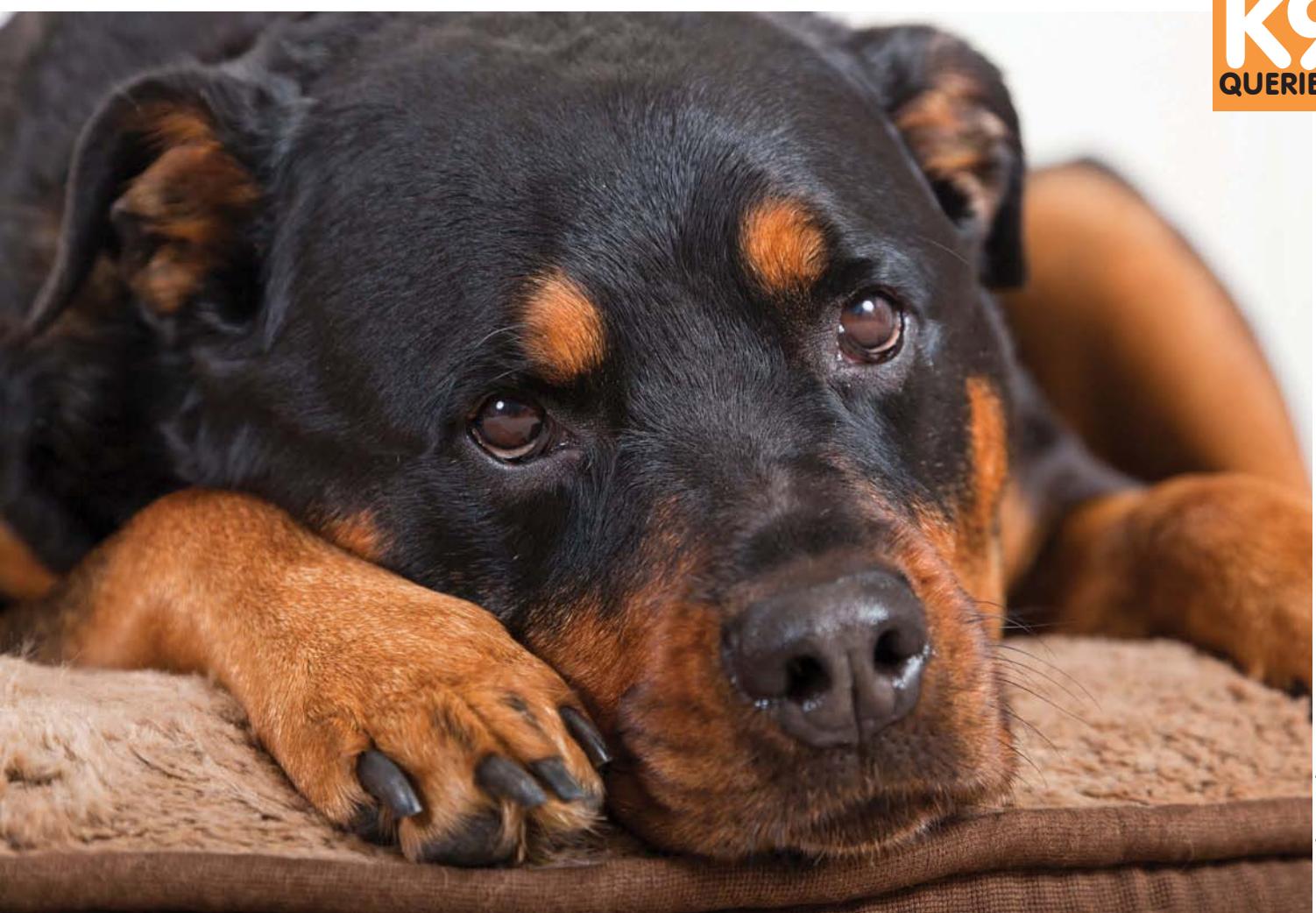
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Rottweiler, posed by a model

Difficult decision

Q My beautiful Rottweiler has been diagnosed with bone cancer. She is only six and has had a number of problems, such as arthritis, hip problems and a thyroid condition. The cancer is in her right front leg and my vet thinks the best course of action is to amputate. Are there any other options?

Paul Manktelow advises...

A There are always treatment options, but I think it's really important to face some questions before you make any decisions. Some of these questions may be quite difficult and in my experience it's always better to discuss them

with your vet, your friends and your family.

Bone cancer is usually very serious. One of the most malignant forms of this cancer is osteosarcoma, which is commonly seen in the limbs and may spread fatally to the lungs. This is a bone tumour that causes degeneration of the strength and structure of the bone, initially causing a painful swelling, but ultimately resulting in irreparable fractures of the bone.

Once osteosarcoma is diagnosed, there is a dilemma, as early amputation may help stop the disease spreading. In a dog that seems happy, has a good quality of life and is mobile on the three remaining limbs, then this is potentially a good option. If the dog has other health problems,

however, limb amputation may complicate these issues, and you might reduce the quality of your dog's life. It's a major decision, but your vet or a referral specialist will be able to guide you through it.

You've mentioned a number of other conditions and it's important to assess, with your vet's help, whether these are affecting your dog's health and well-being. I've seen dogs with arthritis, and a healthy weight and lifestyle, living perfectly happily. On the flip side of the coin, some dogs really struggle with this condition and to layer another problem on top would seriously affect their quality of life. Removing a limb would put additional stress on to their three remaining painful limbs.

Your dog is six years old. That's young by some

standards but for dogs suffering from numerous diseases it could be considered old. You have to help your vet judge your own dog's quality of life. You also need to think about how your dog might manage with an amputated limb. You might decide surgery is the best option, but the reality of helping a large dog cope with such a surgery can be very difficult.

My advice would be to listen to your vet about the facts of the cancer. If amputation offers a reasonable prognosis, then you can start looking into advice on coping with a large, disabled dog. The decision is never easy in these circumstances, but basing your decisions on your dog's needs and quality of life is the best – and really the only – way to go.



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Border Collie, posed by a model

Collie instinct

Q Ben, our Border Collie, is just over a year old. We live in a town and he's a much-loved family pet, but I'm conscious of the fact he still has a sheepdog's instinct to round things up. He sometimes tries to 'herd' the children at home, and in the park he crawls on his tummy towards other dogs and tries to take their balls. His puppy training went well, he knows all the basic commands, and he does usually come back when called.

How much exercise should a dog like Ben have and what games can we play to try to channel his sheepdog behaviour in a more positive way?

Kirsten Dillon advises...

A Despite what many people say, Border Collies can make excellent household pets. However, I should point out here that it is never advisable to source any breed directly from 'working lines' unless you fully intend to provide them with a regular job. It's not just Border Collies that suffer from being placed in a home with insufficient mental and physical stimulation, when their very DNA is screaming out to go to work.

Thankfully, Ben doesn't sound too bad at all, with just some natural instincts coming to the fore. There are so many activities you can do to provide him with the perfect outlet for his energy and work drive – the kids too!

Agility is great fun, as are flyball and rally. All are fast moving and energetic. There's also heelwork to music (doggie dancing), as well as scent and tracking classes, or working trials. For a full look at what's on offer in your area, go to the Kennel Club's website (www.thekennelclub.org.uk/activities) and see what

you fancy. Call up the club secretary and ask about watching a class or two first, as it's important you like the way they teach before you decide to join.

If you'd like to do something a little more bespoke for Ben and the family, then I suggest finding a really good, force-free trainer who can put together a programme for you all. For externally accredited trainers, take a look at www.imdt.uk.com/find-a-qualified-imdt-trainer.html

You specifically asked how much exercise Ben should be getting. A dog that has been bred to do a job of work can often run all day; this isn't practical for our pets, of course. As with all dogs, exercise should take place daily – ideally morning and evening – and combine both physical and mental stimulation. This keeps the mind and body fit and should help avoid many other unwanted behaviours. Keep up the recall work and provide Ben with sufficient reinforcement for coming back to you, such as a ball of his own. A good recall command is priceless.



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Pull of the park

Q My female Labrador is pretty good on the lead except when she knows we are walking to the park. She then pulls me so hard that I've been dragged over on a couple of occasions. I've tried different routes to the park, but she just seems to have an innate sense of when we're going to end up there! Any suggestions please?

Nick Jones advises...

A You're not alone in the way your dog behaves when on the outward journey to a place of great fun and enjoyment! But she needs to learn more self-control and this will have to come from you as a direction giver. We don't want to take the joy away, but equally we can't be pulled over, can we? Time and patience will help a great deal here.

The plan of action starts before you even leave your home, so ask your dog to sit and wait while you get ready, and only allow her out of the door when you say so. If she rushes ahead or barges, bring her back inside and start again. Obviously, once you're some distance away from the house, you'll have to deal with the behaviour there, rather than go back home! Basically, we're trying to show her that calm, relaxed walking equals progress and forward movement, but that pulling or bouncing about equals stopping, coming back a few paces, and waiting for calm before setting off again. This is the most basic of principles, but it's very effective.

I would suggest having a few trial sessions where you don't get as far as the park at all. Focus on small details, such as her behaviour as you leave the house or go through the gate, or the way she walks on the pavement, and deal with any poor behaviour on a micro level rather than focusing on getting to the park.

Remember that all the small steps leading up to the outing, such as putting on her lead, must also be done in an orderly, controlled manner, which should then carry through to the outside.

Being a food-driven Labrador, she would respond well to being rewarded with treats when she walks beside you on the pavement in a relaxed heel position.

Does my dog need a behaviourist?

Q I've been going to training classes with my terrier for a few months and he's really well behaved in class, doing everything I teach him. But as soon as we leave the hall, he forgets everything and behaves as if he's never been trained!

A friend has recently had a behaviourist in to stop her dog pulling on the lead, jumping up at people and chewing the sofa. Her dog is now better behaved than mine, even though she never goes to training. What am I doing wrong? Should I get the behaviourist to see my dog?

Sue Gilmore advises...

A Dog training and solving dog behaviour issues are different things. You go to dog training classes to teach your dog to perform certain tasks, such as sit, retrieve, down, and so on, for which you probably give a treat to reinforce the required response. However, a dog that chews furniture, jumps up, or pulls on the lead, has behavioural problems, which your friend employed a behaviourist to rectify.

Behavioural issues are different from training, which doesn't address or solve the unwanted response of say, a dog deciding not to come back when called, even though he knows what "come" means. In such a case the dog is making a conscious decision to ignore his owner, especially if he sees a squirrel or something more stimulating, and all his training goes out of the window!

A behaviourist will figure out what is causing an unwanted behaviour, such as not coming when called. The reason might be boredom, lack of stimulation, fear, overexcitement, or a combination of things.

In your case, your well-trained terrier does everything properly in a class situation, but it may be that the external environment is affecting him. Or it might be that your instructions lack clarity or, more likely, that you haven't generalised his training situations and environments outside of the classroom.

Good behaviourists will rehabilitate dogs and teach the owner how to address the problems presented by re-channelling the energy between the dog and owner to achieve the desired behaviour. Good trainers, on the other hand, teach handlers and dogs how to perform specific tasks. So ask your trainer how you can overcome the problems you're having, so your dog will remember his training, regardless of where he is.

Jack Russell Terrier, posed by a model



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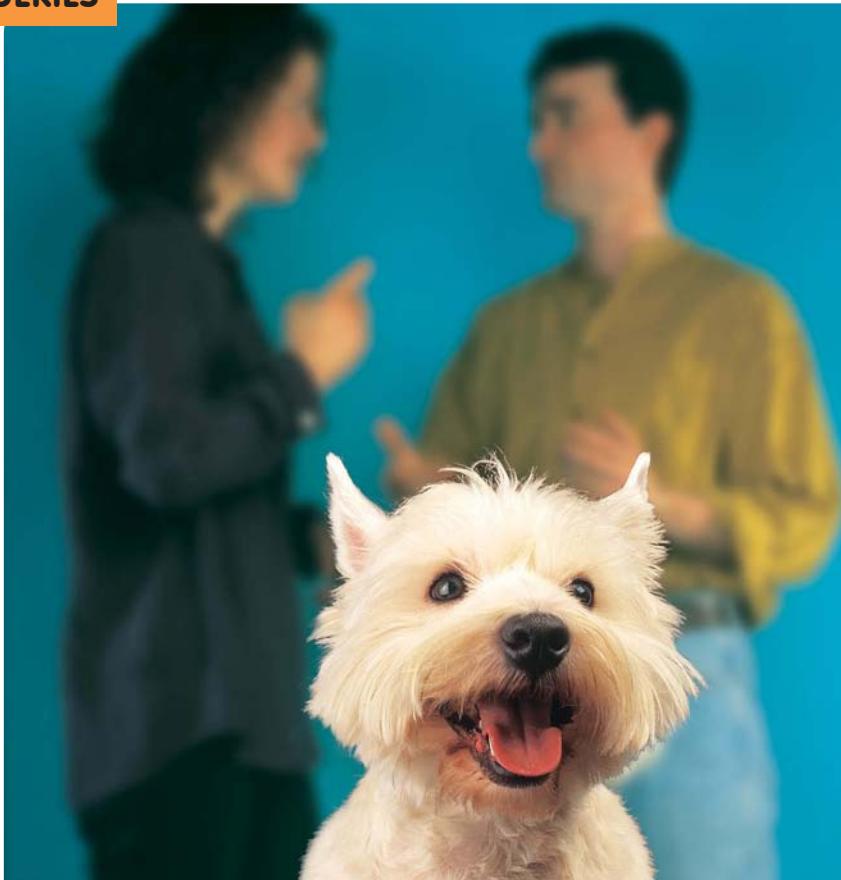
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Care and custody

Q My boyfriend and I are splitting up, and are arguing about who gets custody of our dog. We love him to bits and both want to keep him, but obviously that's not possible. I'd be willing to compromise, but if a dog spends half the week in one house and half in another, could that cause him problems? I think I'm quite a good trainer, but my ex is softer with our dog than I am and indulges him more.

Kirsten Dillon advises...

A I am sorry that you and your partner are separating, but I'm really heartened to hear that you are both still fully committed to your dog and his welfare.

In my opinion, a well-adjusted, sociable dog should be able to cope just fine with living in two places. It is important that you both provide him with plenty of exercise and mental

stimulation while he is with you, just as I am sure you have always done.

I understand your concerns about the obvious difference in your training styles and what is acceptable behaviour from your dog. However, don't underestimate his ability to discriminate and work out differences. Two different locations will only help him to understand that in one place I do 'this' and in the other place I do 'this'. It is, however, vital that both you and your ex are consistent in your own separate behaviours – he may be a smart dog, but he's no mind reader.

I would just point out that if he does show any worrying or out-of-character behaviours, you must seek the advice of a good trainer or behaviourist to help smooth the transition for all concerned.

Finally, the law allows for joint ownership of a dog and it is up to you to agree on payment responsibilities for pet insurance, vet fees and so on. If you do need legal advice, start by having a look at www.lawontheweb.co.uk/legal-help/dog-ownership-laws



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Sleepless nights

Q Our dog is left alone in the kitchen at night, but as soon as we go to bed, he starts howling. Please could you give me some advice to stop this behaviour? My neighbours have started to complain and I'm afraid that we will have to give our dog away, as we live in a flat.

Nick Jones advises...

A I wonder how long this behaviour has been happening? I assume it's also happening during the daytime when you go out, or go to work? Either way, it would seem we are looking at a case of separation anxiety. This simply means that your dog is not coping well when left alone, and suggests a bond between you that's too close. Dogs need to learn to spend periods of time alone from an early age and ideally we would deal with this on a preventative level in the early stages.

A key area to address with dogs that behave like this is to consider the way you act when you arrive or depart. Begin to remove yourself from the dog both physically and emotionally about 30 minutes prior to putting him in the kitchen. Make no attempt to look at him so that the transition from you being there to leaving is more manageable for him. This may be hard for you, but you will be helping your dog!

When it comes to placing him in the kitchen, be matter of fact and avoid affectionate goodbyes or touching. This helps your dog remain in a relaxed emotional state, not wound up and desperate for fuss to continue. Try giving him a small stuffed Kong to distract him as you leave. These measures alone should help your dog.

If your dog starts to bark or howl at night, don't be tempted to reappear or call out to him. What can help is to walk to a point close enough to be heard, and make a firm but not loud 'tap-tap' noise on the banister or wall with a hard implement. Repeat as often as needed while the howling continues. This interrupts the dog's barking without causing fear, and many clients confirm it can help a great deal when used as part of a bigger plan of action.

Big bully

Q I have a gentle terrier cross who's about six years old. I also have another dog, a female Rottweiler, who is a year old. Now the Rottweiler has grown up, she has started to bully my older dog and sometimes it gets quite nasty. I have to leave them in separate rooms whenever I go out, as I'm starting to fear for my older dog. Why has the Rottie started to become a bully?

Rottweiler and Terrier, posed by models



Nick Jones advises...

A I think you're most likely seeing a natural progression in your younger dog as she climbs the 'pack ladder' and starts to challenge your other dog – plus, a healthy young Rottweiler is an exuberant character and always looking for something to do!

It is important that you do not allow the young Rottweiler to flex her size and weight advantage over the older dog to the point of showing aggression. I hear some people advise that dogs should be left to 'sort it out', but this should never be allowed, as serious injury can occur.

You need to be firm but fair should your Rottie's

behaviour become excessive in any way. You don't need to shout, but you will need to quietly show her that such aggressive displays will not be tolerated. Keeping a lead on your young Rottie should allow you to step in quickly if needed.

It is essential that you intervene straight away if you feel the situation is deteriorating in front of you. Try placing the Rottie in a 'time out' for a minute if she's

behaving poorly, and then allow her back in the room once she's calm and quiet. Repeat as needed.

Ensure your younger dog understands that you won't tolerate overt bullying or aggressive behaviour. She may well be 'top dog', even though she's only 12 months old, but that is OK and you must generally support her role if she is clearly the more dominant dog of the two.

I've seen a number of

problems like this where a younger dog emerges as the natural leader of two dogs in a home, but the owner wants to support and stand up for the longer-established and much-loved older dog. I can understand this, it's a natural way to feel, but it can cause problems of its own.

When you're not in the house, for peace of mind I would continue to keep them apart if you're at all concerned. That way no harm can occur. I suspect the next six months or so will be crucial, so monitor the situation carefully. If you see any further deterioration, I would advise seeking the help of a canine behaviourist who is a specialist in dog-on-dog aggression.



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Labrador. Photo posed by models

"She's frightened of my soppy dog"

Q My brother and his family have just moved back to the area where I live and recently visited with their two children. The youngest, who is seven, was quite frightened by our soft old Labrador. She hasn't had a bad experience; she just doesn't know dogs, and

shrieked when Nelson moved anywhere near her (although he was actually more interested in her biscuit!). Her mother got quite agitated for no reason too, and I suspect this is where my niece's fear comes from.

Even though I had no worries at all about Nelson's behaviour, I took him out of

the room straight away, and will shut him in the kitchen next time they come.

I think it's sad that she's like this, though, and wonder if you have any advice for introducing nervous children to docile dogs, assuming her mother agrees? Nelson would be the perfect schoolmaster.

Kirsten Dillon advises...

A This type of letter breaks my heart. It's such a shame for a child (or indeed, adult) to be that frightened of anything, let alone an adorable, gentle Labrador.

From what you have described, Nelson sounds perfect to help them both,



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Reward him for not moving and ask your niece to go as close to him as she feels comfortable. Don't rush this process; let your niece tell you how close is close enough. Build up to her perhaps touching Nelson's tail. I have found that nervous people (and indeed nervous dogs) cope better with the end that has no teeth!

You have a responsibility here for both your niece and your dog, so be led by them, give them choices and keep these introductions short and successful. If either one chooses to move away then the only thing you can do is respect this and try again later.

Be wary of letting her feed Nelson straight away. If he's a typical Labrador, he may be a little too enthusiastic about treats and inadvertently scare her. Tell your niece to throw the treats on the floor for him initially, if that's what she prefers. And don't forget to reinforce her calm behaviour with sweets or a treat too – that's just as important!

Work up from Nelson's tail until she is stroking him comfortably all over, and just bear in mind this is likely to take more than one visit.

In between times, keep them separated and make it fully worth his while to be alone by providing Nelson with a stuffed Kong or bone, which will help keep his associations with your visitors positive too.

Encourage both your sister-in-law and your niece to learn a little about dogs from a reputable resource, such as the RSPCA, Blue Cross or Kennel Club. The more we understand something, the less we fear it.

but you must first ensure your sister-in-law is fully on board and encourage her to participate too. I think you might be correct in your suggestion that her fear has been projected on to her child.

Start with Nelson in a sit or down position and ask him to stay there.



Destructive dog

Q I am just about fed up with my four-year-old dog chewing things and destroying his toys. He has ripped my son's coat to shreds and generally gets his teeth into anything that's chewable. I keep having to replace the doormat, practically every week. How can I stop him being so destructive?

Sue Gilmore advises...

A Finding cherished possessions destroyed by your dog is annoying at best, and can be devastating if he destroys something of monetary or sentimental value. Venting your anger on the dog, however, will achieve nothing more than transmitting negative energy to him. He may even become unbalanced and go off to find something else to chew, so try to remain calm.

Chewing has a soothing effect on dogs. Puppies chew when teething and older dogs find chewing items stimulating, so provide something your dog can chew safely, like a toy stuffed with tasty food or a raw bone. Your dog will not understand the value of whatever it is he decides to chew, so make sure you keep treasured items out of sight and out of reach.

Molly, a Bedlington-cross, posed by a model. Photo by Tim Rose (www.timrosephotography.co.uk)



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“Help! She’s got too much energy!”

Q We are finding our five-month-old Springer Spaniel puppy, Bella, a bit of a handful. She has boundless energy and we are struggling to cope with this in the house. I have enrolled on some training classes, but do you have any other suggestions to help tire her out?



Springer Spaniel, posed by a model



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Sue Williams advises...

A Springers are really active dogs. In my experience of training sniffer dogs, after a day's training most Springers would happily continue into the night, unlike other breeds, such as Labradors, who were happy to just chill and relax at the end of a busy day!

With Bella it's going to be a case of teaching her when to be calm and relaxed, and at the same time ensuring you meet her need to exercise. As she is young, it's important not to over-exercise her, so a good mix of brain games and physical exercise is going to be best.

Training will help you enormously and it is essential to train any dog so you have control. Training in itself is mentally demanding, as it will require Bella to think and concentrate.

Teaching her a good recall should be particularly important to you, as off-lead exercise is going to be essential. You should also ensure you teach her to retrieve. Playing retrieve games is an excellent way to burn energy and dogs love it.

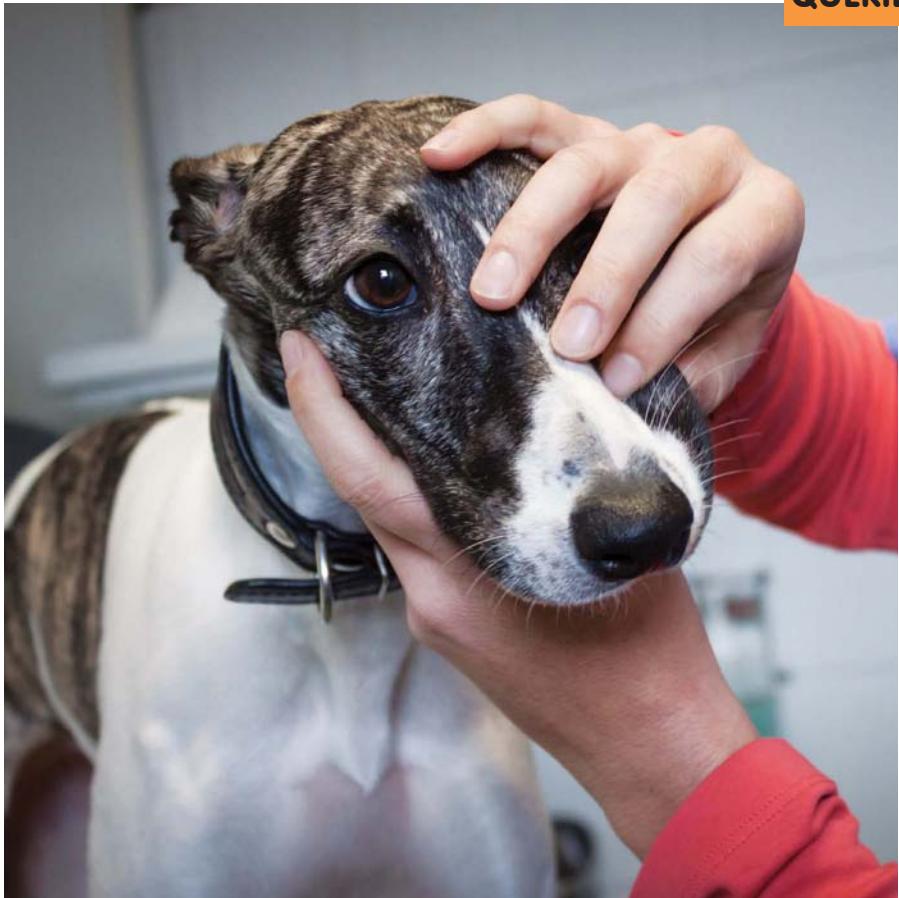
Many people don't realise that mental exercise is equally important, and tiring in itself. As gundogs, Springers have exceptional noses and naturally enjoy scent challenges. There are lots of fun scent games you can play with Bella, both out on walks and in the home, which will keep her amused. At my centre we regularly run day courses in scent training, so look for a training centre near you that offers similar courses and give it a go – you will not only have a great time, but also come away with lots of ideas.

Most Springers love water, so consider taking Bella for some swimming lessons – there are some great pools specifically for dogs. Swimming offers excellent exercise, particularly for youngsters, as it doesn't put too much strain on their developing joints.

There are many other activities you can enjoy with Bella, such as teaching tricks, clicker training and so on.

It's also going to be important to teach her to be calm when you need her to be. I find the easiest way to teach a dog to settle – either on their bed or in their crate – is by giving them a Kong stuffed with food or something similar. This will not only occupy Bella but show her that spending time on her bed is a positive thing.

Greyhound, posed by a model

**"He needs to put on weight"**

Q My dog is underweight, but the vets can't find anything wrong with him. He seems OK in himself and I've tried giving him extra food, but he doesn't eat it. My vet has advised I change his food, but what should I change him on to?

Libby Sheridan advises...

A Having an underweight dog can be just as difficult to deal with as an overweight one. It's good that your vet has given your dog a clean bill of health, as there are some medical conditions that can result in weight loss, and your vet will be able to monitor any trends. Some dogs will also be underweight as a result of intestinal worms, so you should ideally worm him every three months with a reliable (vet-prescribed) wormer – don't rely on wormers bought in a supermarket or a pet shop.

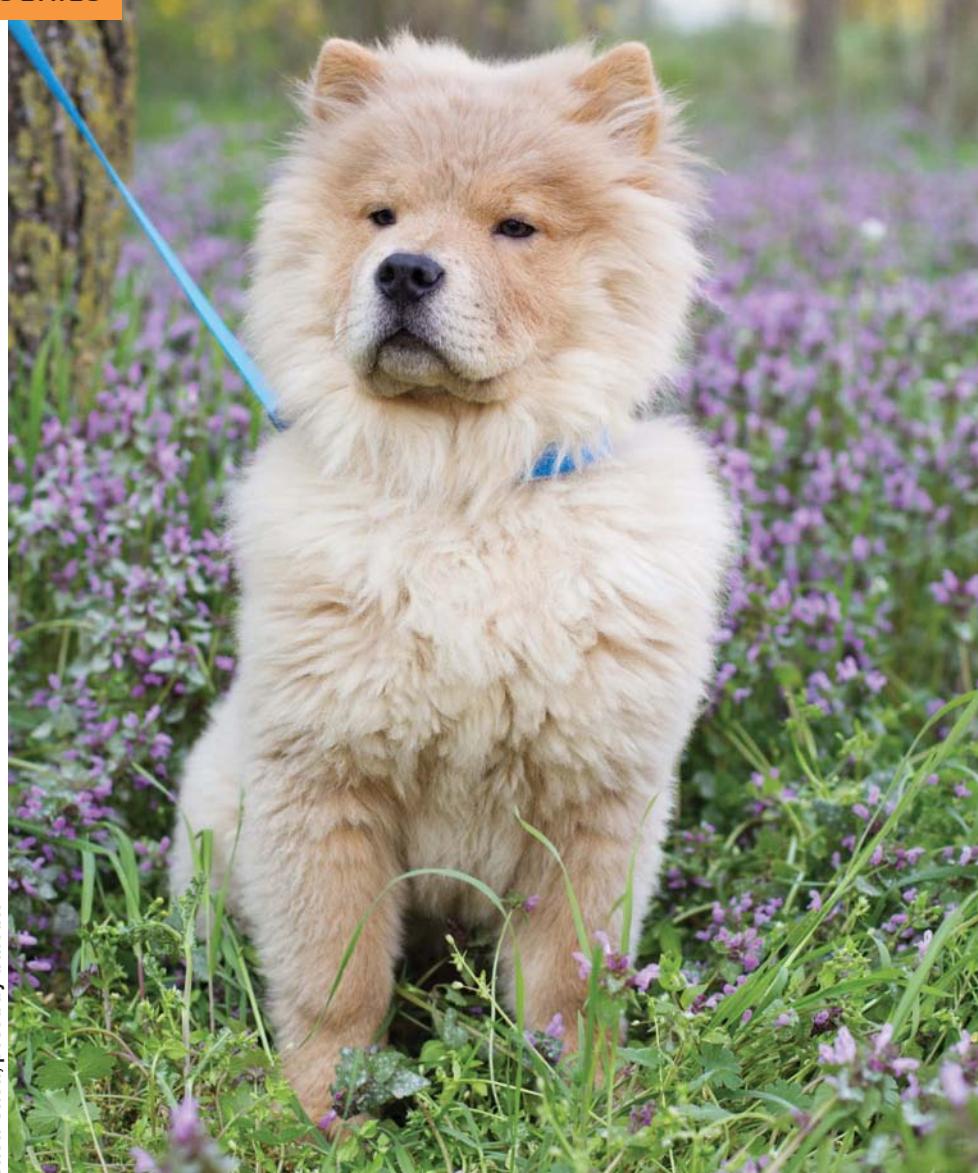
With these conditions ruled out, a diet change might be a sensible idea. Just like people, some food types suit some dogs better than others. Finding a diet that suits your dog and gives him the nutrition he needs to put on a healthy amount of weight may take some time, but is important to do.

If he's particularly active and bouncy, there are performance-type diets available that are highly digestible and higher in calories. You don't say how underweight your vet thinks your dog is, but any gain needs to be at a steady rate to allow time for his joints and body to adapt. Sudden changes in what or how much you feed can also cause dietary upsets, so take it slowly, adding in about 10 per cent more food to start with, and only gradually increasing the amount every two weeks or so, after your vet has had a chance to recheck him.

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Chow Chow, posed by a model

Dull coat

Q My dog's coat looks a bit dull and someone has told me it is due to diet. I have always fed the same food to all my dogs and have never had this problem before. Should I give her a supplement?

Libby Sheridan advises...

A Nutrition is a very important part of our pets' health and it plays a vital role in keeping them healthy, both inside and out. You've not said if your dog has lost hair anywhere on her body, or if her coat is thinning – these signs can indicate a medical problem, so you would need to see your vet if this is the case.

If not, and the coat's just a bit dull, some dogs do benefit from supplements of the essential fatty acids omega-3 and omega-6. These are vital for health and some foods don't include as much of them as certain dogs need. Bags of food that have been open too long and started to degrade might also have depleted levels of fatty acids. Ask your vet for advice if you are not sure.

French leave

Q We're thinking of renting a gite in France and taking our dog with us instead of putting him in kennels as we normally do. Do we have to tell our insurance provider that we're taking him abroad and will he need special insurance?

If there's an emergency and he has to see a vet in France, do we just pay up front, keep the receipt, and then fill in a claim form when we get back? Or is there some extra documentation we need to get from the French vet?

Mark Effenberg advises...

A If you're considering travelling abroad with your pet, you first need to check that your insurance policy provides cover for overseas travel. This can be done by either contacting your insurer direct, or reading through the policy's terms and conditions. Your insurer will also be able to explain the procedure by which claims can be made and any exclusions that may be in place.

Generally speaking, in the event your pet requires veterinary treatment while abroad, you should pay the vet direct. When you return home, call your insurer's claims helpline and report the claim. You will then be sent a claims form to complete and return with all the paid receipts from the overseas vet.

Remember, you'll also need to apply for a pet passport from your own vet. The vet practice will be able to advise you about the procedures for safe travel between countries and what is required for you to leave and re-enter the UK with your dog.



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Photo posed by models

Sofa so good

Q I have a bit of a quandary. We have a Cockapoo, Molly, who is six months old. I want to hug and cuddle her and am happy with her being up on the sofa. But my husband doesn't agree. To me, this time I have with her is important. I've read you need to be consistent with dogs, though, so does this mean she can't join me on the sofa for a cuddle?

Sue Williams advises...

A The situation you describe is common and although you're quite right about consistency, the good news is that it's possible to teach Molly who she can and can't have sofa cuddles with and when it's appropriate to do so!

Personally, I'm like you. I love cuddling, chilling and relaxing with my dogs. I feel this is important for our bond, but, on the other hand, I really don't like dogs who are bad mannered and leap on top of visitors' laps.

What you need to do is teach Molly that she is only allowed on the sofa when you tell her she can. By putting the behaviour on cue and making it by invitation only, she won't jump up unless told to do so. It's important that you are consistent and only allow her up when you ask her.

This way, Molly won't bother your husband or anyone else unless they choose to invite her to join them on the sofa for a hug!

Introductory discounts

Q A lot of insurance companies now seem to offer big discounts for new policyholders – typically 25 per cent off – on pet, car, household insurance and so on. Being of an older generation, I've always been a loyal customer and I don't really think this is fair.

If I decide 'if you can't beat them, join them', and go to a new company for the discount, are there dangers in switching provider every year? I understand all about pre-existing conditions, but my dog doesn't have anything like that.

Mark Effenberg advises...

A With regards to insurance, it's common practice for consumers to shop around at renewal to try to find a cheaper premium. However, pet insurance does work slightly differently in that if your dog develops any conditions that require ongoing cover, switching your insurance will mean these conditions are no longer covered. Generally speaking, an insurance company will not provide cover for any conditions that existed prior to the inception date of the new policy. And while your dog may not currently have any such conditions, a renewal premium will include full comprehensive cover for anything he may go on to develop.

If you decide to take out a new policy, bear in mind that most companies will have an exclusion period at the start of the new policy whereby any illness or

injury claims will not be covered for a stated number of days. It's also important to remember that while there may be cheaper alternatives to your current policy renewal, these may not provide the same level of cover for your dog. For example, accident-only and time-limited policies may have cheaper premiums, but they don't provide the same level of cover as a maximum-benefit or lifetime policy.

Another option would be to discuss your renewal quote with your insurance company and see if there is anything you can do to reduce the premium. Having your pet neutered can reduce premiums, as can opting for a higher level of excess. It's also important to make sure the information the insurance company holds on you and your pet is up to date. If you've moved to a new area in the last 12 months, for example, this might reduce your premium.



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Snow-white sweeties!

Your at-a-glance guide to the Maltese

If you watched Crufts this year, then many of you must surely have been rooting for the stunning snow-white Maltese in the seven-dog line-up for Best in Show.

Having won Best in Group for Toy dogs, Italian-bred Sasha (Cinecitta Sasha Baron Colen to give him his full name) looked every inch the star of the show as he floated around the hallowed green carpet in front of judge Ronnie Irving. But on this occasion, Sasha didn't get the top accolade, which went to a Scottish Terrier (see *Dogs Monthly* March 2015 – for back issues turn to page 95).

A Maltese has never yet won BIS at Crufts, but in 1976 the British-bred bitch Maytheas Delila took the Reserve spot.

HISTORY

The Maltese's country of origin, as its name suggests, is the island of Malta, with evidence suggesting that the breed dates back to Roman times when it was bred as a companion and lap dog. It's thought small dogs were taken to the island by Phoenician traders where, over the course of years, the dogs were selectively bred to achieve the desired type. Although white is the only permitted colour these days, again this has been achieved through selective breeding.

Opinion varies on when and how the Maltese first

How much?

Expect to pay around £800-£1,500 (depending on the sex, pedigree lines, and whether the pups are inoculated and parents' health-tested) for a KC-registered Maltese puppy from a reputable breeder.

Bear in mind that a higher price doesn't necessarily mean a healthier or better type, and you may have to be prepared to wait for a healthy puppy, since responsibly bred Maltese are not readily available. Contact the breed clubs (see 'Useful contacts') for breeder information.

came to Britain. One line of thought is that they may have come with Emperor Claudius, while another is that they arrived in the 14th century with soldiers returning from the Crusades, and their handsome appearance and amenable temperament found favour with the aristocracy.

Back then, they were called Maltese Terriers but, explains Brian Lees, secretary of the



At-a-glance expert tips

Always buy from a reputable breeder, such as a breed club member, to avoid purchasing from a puppy farmer.

- View the pup, plus his mum, littermates and (if possible) his father, in the breeder's home prior to purchase. Check that the parents' temperaments are good.
- Meet as many Maltese as you can by visiting dog shows, attending breed club social events and talking to owners and breeders.
- Take your time finding the right breeder. Be patient, as it takes a long time to breed a good, healthy litter.
- Start training as soon as you get the puppy home; find a good trainer to help, and begin puppy socialisation classes once your pup is fully vaccinated.



Breed focus

Maltese Club (founded in 1934), "Today they are known as Maltese or Malts. Sometimes you see them referred to in print as the Maltese Terrier, but this is a misleading. The 'Terrier' element of the name was dropped in around 1902. They do not, and should not, display terrier characteristics."

According to the Maltese Club, in 1839 the Duchess

of Kent, Queen Victoria's mother, commissioned Sir Edwin Landseer to paint the portrait of her little dog Quiz in which he was depicted snuggled up against the massive head of her Newfoundland. Later, around 1851, the Duchess commissioned a pastel portrait of her Maltese, Lambkin. Copies of this work are reproduced for sale to this day and illustrate just how little the

breed has changed since those times.

TEMPERAMENT & SUITABILITY

"Generally, Maltese are active, friendly and happy dogs," explains Brian. "They can be a bit aloof with strangers, but should never be aggressive. They love to cuddle up on your lap at the end of a busy day.

"They are, though, perhaps not an ideal first breed due to the amount of grooming needed if the owners wish to grow the coat long. And, as they like company, a Maltese might not be a good choice for someone out at work all day.

"Maltese usually get on well with people and children, although, like most dogs, they don't like being poked and

KC facts

Toy breeds are small companion or lap dogs, and many of them were bred for this purpose, although some have been placed into this Kennel Club category simply due to their size. They should have friendly personalities and love attention. They do not need a large amount of exercise and some can be finicky eaters.



Breed file

Size: Small.

Height & weight: Height at the shoulder (withers): not exceeding 25cm (10in). Ideal weight when mature around 3-4kg (6.5-8.5lb).

Lifespan: On average, 14 years.

Exercise: Brian says, "A small secure garden for the Maltese to run and play will provide sufficient space for exercise several times a day. The ability to take your dog for a 30-minute walk around the block would also be beneficial, but not essential. And don't forget to take a poop bag."

Grooming: According to Brian, "A fully grown Maltese should be capable of growing a coat to the floor. This looks very glamorous and will attract lots of admiring glances. But it comes at a price: daily grooming for at least an hour or two, bathing every few days, and total devotion to maintaining that lovely silky white coat.

"Good-quality combs and brushes and specialised shampoos and conditioners are a must, and these don't come cheap. However, a Maltese can be made to look very presentable with a visit to the groomer every four to six weeks, at a fraction of the cost both in time and money. This option is much more practical and appropriate for a dog that's purely a pet.

"A simple pin brush and small metal comb is all that will be needed to keep your Maltese tidy in between visits to the groomer. If this is still found to be too much, your groomer might advise an even shorter clip, which is much easier to manage. At the end of the day, you still have a Maltese – and one that is happy and comfortable – and an owner who doesn't have to worry too much about lots of grooming."



Ensure the ears, under the tail and the sheath (in males) are kept clean, and check the nails do not get too long so as to cause discomfort – ask a breeder or dog groomer to show you how to maintain them, or do them for you, on a regular basis.

Colours: Pure-white. Slight lemon markings are permissible. Dark brown eyes,

with black rims. Black nose.

Health: Says Brian, "Like many breeds in the Toy group, Maltese can be susceptible to slipping patellas. Dental health can be a problem if mouths and teeth are not kept clean. Several products are on the market to help with this and careful choice of food always helps. A small number of

Safety first

For safety's sake (both child's and dog's), no young children should be left unsupervised with any dog.

cases of syringomyelia (SM) have been reported, but this is not believed to be very widespread."

Diet: Dry kibble is Brian's diet of choice for his Malts. "There's a large variety of choices on the market including gluten-free. With the dry food make sure there is always a supply of clean, fresh water available. Wet food is not always a good idea, as it can stain the coat around the face, leading to the need for additional grooming and teeth cleaning."

It's a good idea to ask the breeder for advice on life-stage feeding, or contact the breed clubs for information on how best to feed Maltese.

KC breed standard & more info: tinyurl.com/k9spj4d

Breed focus



pulled by very young and inquisitive children. They can be a bit reserved until they get to know any newcomer, be it canine or human.

"A small house with access to a secure garden would provide sufficient space for play and exercise, although anything larger would almost certainly be appreciated by the more adventurous Maltese. Even a flat would be OK, as long as there are nearby safe, dog-friendly facilities for exercise."

TRAINING

Brian describes the Maltese as intelligent and generally quick to learn. "But they do possess a stubborn streak," he warns, "and will occasionally only do things on their own terms. They are cheeky, so the trick is to remember who is in charge, since once they find a crack in your resolve, they will exploit it."

ACTIVITIES

Maltese enjoy a good run about and some have even been trained to do agility.

Says Brian, "They are capable of being obedient

and several have attained the Kennel Club Good Citizen Dog Scheme awards. Our annual club fun day often sees our Maltese taking part in races along a short track – with varying degrees of success – but all with the same enthusiasm and delight.

"Although I haven't heard of Maltese being used in the UK as therapy dogs, we bred a Maltese who now lives in Canada, who qualified for this role. He regularly visits children with learning difficulties, and the elderly in hospital and care homes, with some remarkable results. With the correct training and guidance, the Maltese is very capable of therapy work, if an owner is so inclined."

KEY ADVICE

So what key advice would Brian and the Maltese Club give to anyone thinking of getting one of these beautiful and charming little dogs?

"Research the breed and your own situation to determine if the Maltese would fit your lifestyle. Are you prepared to make the sacrifices needed

– the time, exercise and, most importantly, grooming? Balance these against the potential rewards a Maltese will bring to you and your life.

"If any of your friends have a Maltese, then talk to them about it and ask how they managed when they brought their Maltese puppy home.

"Resolve to find a reputable breeder and arrange to visit them in their home to see all the puppies in the litter and always with their mother. Try not to make an instant decision to take the first puppy you see, and try to visit more than one breeder to draw a comparison.

"A responsible breeder should not push you into making a decision and should be happy to answer any questions you have. You should also be prepared to be asked questions about yourselves, where you live and how you will keep the puppy safe should you be allowed to purchase one.

"It is worth noting that our club code of ethics recommends that a puppy should not leave for its new home below the age of 12 weeks." ●

Thanks

Thanks to Brian Lees and the Maltese Club for information provided for this feature.

Useful contacts

Interested in owning a Maltese? Then contact the breed clubs for more in-depth information on suitability for your circumstances, care and training advice, and details of responsible breeders, along with details of social events, shows, breed activities and seminars.

• **Maltese Club** Brian Lees 01522 694627

• **Maltese Club of Scotland** Cathy Grant 0131 666 1308

• **Rescue & welfare:** Contact the breed clubs above.

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Tail end

From the dog's mouth...

"Does my head look big in this?"

Cone of shame

Our canine correspondent **Molly** is forced to endure the indignity of the dreaded cone collar...

Before last week, I had heard tales of cruel cones of plastic placed around dogs' heads; unfeeling objects, which I assumed were invented with the sole aim of breaking an animal's spirit. I had never been subjected to the indignity of wearing one and felt confident that my owners would know better than to ever attempt to inflict such a thing on me. While a docile Labrador might submit, a spirited Airedale with a character such as mine would never tolerate such a ridiculous item of clothing. However, readers, last week my beliefs on this matter were shattered.

I'd been having a spot of bother with a patch of skin on my back. You know how it

is: it gets a bit itchy... so you give it a lick... then another lick... then the fur gets a bit stuck together... and it all gets increasingly troublesome. But still, I was on top of the situation and would have resolved it eventually.

The vet had other ideas, however. The area was unceremoniously shaved, leaving a most unattractive bald spot, some healing cream was prescribed and then, to my deep horror, a large piece of plastic was handed to my owner with instructions about how to bend it into a cone shape.

This instrument of humiliation was constructed as soon as we arrived home, and then all four members of the

household were summoned in order to place it around my head. My mistress was clearly anticipating a struggle and I did not disappoint. But sadly, with a human at each corner, I did finally lose my battle.

BETRAYAL

For the first 10 minutes I sat very still, nursing feelings of hurt and betrayal. How could they do this to me?

I then tried to jump on to my favourite sofa, but misjudged my newly extended dimensions, collided with the arm and fell back to the floor again. The humans made some play of attempting to stifle laughter, but I could hear their unkind sniggers. I was then helped up on to the sofa and

some soothing words were spoken. I sat there for a few minutes, considering this state of affairs. The humans stood by somewhat anxiously.

And then, readers, the full force of my passionate nature kicked in. Was I going to accept this pitiful state of affairs? No, I most certainly was not!

I began by banging my huge plastic head-dress on the back of the sofa in an attempt to dislodge it. This failed, but I did nearly break a lamp. I then attempted to undo the fastenings by furiously scratching with my paws, but again, no success. I rolled on my back, shaking my head and squirming violently from side to side. Still the monstrosity refused to move, so I sat up again, growling under my breath.

Then, a light-bulb moment, an ingenious plan! Standing on the sofa, I lifted one of my front paws and lodged it firmly between the collar and my neck. At this point, of course, I became perilously unstable, teetering on the very edge. This was a risky strategy – had I fallen, I would have landed hard on the shoulder of the leg now wedged between the collar and my neck, but I knew what I was doing, oh yes. And, sure enough, with a shriek of alarm, my mistress hurled herself across the room to catch me, as I toppled off the edge of the sofa towards the hard, tiled floor.

After this near calamity, the cone was removed, as clearly a little patch of irritated skin is a minor inconvenience compared to the broken bones that I'd shown would result were it left around my neck a moment longer. So there you have it: an admittedly risky strategy, but a winning one. ●

About the author



Emma Taylor is a mother of two and first-time dog owner. **Molly** is an Airedale Terrier's

Airedale Terrier, which is no mean feat but a bit terrifying if you're a first-time dog owner.

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